"Keep Thy Solemn Feasts"

BY

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THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

KANSAS CITY, KANSAS

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"KEEP THY SOLEMN FEASTS"

MEDITATIONS
BY

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TRANSLATED FROM THE DUTCH
BY

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Devotional literature

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FOREWORD

IN high overspirituality it has long been advocated, in parts of Europe, to do away with our Solemn Feasts, but the general tenor of our Christian life in broader circles demanded that they continue to be kept.

Though some children of God, who in the even tenor of their lives have nothing that distracts them, meditate every day on the great acts of God, yea, that in times of spiritual tension such as our fathers saw, the remembrance of the mighty events of which Christ is the central figure, in broader circles remains even perennially fresh, with the great masses of believers, in ordinary times, every day business of life is too distracting for this, and spiritual life not sufficiently alert.

Without our Solemn Feast the grateful memories of the miracles of our salvation would perceptibly decrease. Every time again in the course of the year they concentrate anew the attention of all upon these miracles. Even by the large place which they occupy in the course of days they reflect the high significance which what is commemorated possesses for our life.

This is what these Solemn Feasts are for. Preaching on these days rejuvenates the happy memory of them to smallest historical particulars. On those days a heightened frame of mind is abroad. Festive songs are sung in our homes. And the fact of the feast itself—addresses old and young to rouse a festive frame of mind of their own.

And there is more to it than this.

Increasing apostacy attacks the sacred reality of Christian history. Unbelief extending itself hand

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over hand aims to have the crib of Bethlehem go up in legend, to explain the resurrection of the Savior as creation of apostolic imagination. Jesus did not ascend into heaven and could not so ascend. The Pentecost miracle is pure invention.

Therefore to him who fell away from the Christian religion it remains a rock of offence, that all the world still keeps her Christmas, her Easter, Ascension and Pentecost miracle feasts. That must no longer be. There must come an end to this. And to hasten this end, they impart to these Solemn Feast days a glimpse of an entirely different meaning.

Yet this avails them not.

Throughout all the world Christendom continues to keep her Solemn Feasts, and the very fact that these Solemn Feasts are masoned as it were with all the fixedness of a stone wall into our reckoning of time, makes them year by year renew their witness for the truth of God.

When Nahum the prophet, in his vision of salvation, on the mountains overheard from afar the footsteps of him who publishes good tidings, he charged Judah (1:15) saying: "Keep thy Solemn Feasts," adding thereto: "Perform unto the Lord thy vows."

To keep solemn feasts without making our offerings is semblance without reality.

And our offering is none other than that we do not withhold from our God what we have promised Him.

KUYPER.

The Hague, December 1, 1903.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

IT IS of children the Psalmist (127) saith: "They are an heritage of the Lord", and, "happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them"; but it may equally be said of great men: They are an heritage of the Lord, and happy are the nations that have their quiver full of them.

So it is not without significance, that every nation has its rosters of great men, of men who are national figures, and of international interest; men who by their deeds have written their names on the pages of history, and whom no student can ignore; men who have made national renown a matter of just pride, and are the honored possessors of those deathless tributes which form the ties that bind the nations of the world as into one bundle of world-wide human life. It is to them that we, who are "merely folks", owe debts which we can not hope to pay. And in any land recognition of the "God of the nations" brings to His altars continuously the sacrifices of joyous praise and thanksgiving for "great men" as His gift.

Abraham Kuyper was one of these in a rare sense. In ways more varied than falls to the lot of many, he performed well-nigh herculean tasks. For more than fifty years his work held him in the lime-light. And the history of his country in those years can not be read, without meeting his name on well-nigh every page.

It is not often that a nation is enriched by the gift of a man of the Kuyper type. Endowed with unusual powers, he set himself unusual tasks, which he accomplished with equally unusual measures of strength. The one which claims our attention in connection with the volume in hand, was, the writing of devotional meditations.

That in the midst of his gigantic public labors, which held him subject constantly to keen scrutiny and sharp criticism, he had spirit, let alone time, for more than forty years, to write devotional "Meditations" on some text or passage of Scripture, at the rate of one a week, till at the time of his death they had

reached the almost unbelievable number of more than two thousand, is by itself a matter of absorbing interest. For these "Meditations" are cameo studies of Revelation and life. They are masterly correlatives of the one to the other. They are a varied analysis of the Christian life, as lived in the soul and practiced by the individual believer. They approach this from well-nigh every conceivable angle. To mention a few: From the angle of the home, in 58 meditations, under the title, "When thou sittest in thine house"; from the angle of the Lord's Day, presenting a meditation for every Sunday of the year, under the title, "An Omer for the Sabbath"; from the angle of the sickroom and deathbed, in 50 meditations under the title, "In the Shadow of Death"; from the angle of mourning for the dead, in 52 meditations, under the title, "Asleep in Jesus"; from the angle of personal, mystical fellowship between the soul and the Eternal Being, in 110 meditations on "To Be Near Unto God", which title may well be taken as title for all the meditations he ever wrote. For he wrote from the conviction, that conscious nearness to God and unbroken fellowship with Him, is Christian living, and through grace is bound to bear fruit worthy of being laid as "good works" on the altar of God. All his meditations borrow their title and content from the Word of God. As a whole they present a mine of instruction in personal religion, both devout and mystical, but always practical and of sound common sense.

Even a cursory glance at these meditations rouses wonder, that a man of his stamp would write week by week such personal, admonishing and edifying short essays for the spiritual life of the people. It was a piece of heroism. It demanded laying bare something of his innermost self. As a whole, his meditations are not only an open confession of Christ, but a zealous defence as well of "the truth as it is in Christ", the "Christ of the Scriptures". And a man of his conspicuous station might well have shrunk from so open a confession of Jesus, and have spared himself the loss of popular applause, which it entailed.

There is much reticence abroad, regarding one's personal religious faith, under the guise of modesty and of respect for privacy of Christian feeling and conviction. Such silence, ordinarily maintains a popularity, perhaps superficial, which by an open confession of the Nazarene, is sacrificed.

Kuyper realized this. He felt what his witness for Christ did for him in the minds of those who differed from him. In 1897 he frankly confessed, that more than once he had been sorely tempted to sacrifice some part of the whole truth of the Christ of the Scriptures, for the sake of retaining the cordial fellowship of his brethren.

But in an unusual way the reality of the living Christ had taken hold of the man. He did not begin life with it. Even when he began his ministry he was a stranger to it. But by deep and searching experiences he learned Christ. And the battle was not fought in a day. Self was not brought into subjection to the obedience of Christ, save at the price of a long and hard-fought fight. Master of powers such as his, he was open to attacks from within and from without, to which the very greatness of his spirit exposed him. In words of another: "There was the iron strength of this Napoleon of intellect; the passion for rule natural to one born to lead; the autocratic bend of spirit, as well as other 'defects of greatness' which were bound to give offence. Writes one, on Kuyper's seventieth birthday: "We are not blind to the defects of this man, in whom, more than in many of his nature, the eternal human was bound to come to vehement revelation."

And to no one did this assume more real proportions than to Kuyper himself. No one entered under the impression of it more deeply than he. In his own heart he faced the presence of indwelling sin. He felt a shudder at the sight of the moral leprosy of unregenerated human nature. In the light of God's Word he saw and sensed the manifold hideousness of sin. In himself he knew himself lost. But with it came to him the vision of the world's Savior from sin. In his own soul he experienced the cleansing power of the blood of Christ, not as a lifeless dogma, but as a vital force, a regenerating reality, which made him glory in Christ and Him crucified.

How nobly he fought "the good fight" and overcame, is attested by the writer, who referred to "the eternal human" in Kuyper: "But memorable remains the fact, (and it tunes the heart to gratitude) that that same power, tempered by Christian self-control, has in such measure unfolded itself into glorious fruition, that he was able to gain the ear, even of those who were unwilling to be convinced, by his mighty plea for the good right of the Christian world-view".

His great popularity, writes another, especially among his followers, Dr. Kuyper has not won by his greatness, but much more by his "littleness", his being humble with the humble, being approachable by the most plain, by lending a willing ear to their requests and their griefs, and making these the subject of consideration; by showing to all who came to him to pour out their griefs or seek his advice, a knowledge of affairs of all sorts which compelled admiration and homage."

Writes still another: "How wonderfully he revelled in the fellowship of his Savior. With his own experience he warmed the spiritual life of others, and deepened their faith. With strong wing-beat he bore our souls upward from the cheerless reality of this earth to the sunny reality of heaven."

Without this deep personal experience, which but deepened with time, it is impossible to interpret the man and his work. This made him utter those memorable words in his brilliant oration, "Sovereignty in One's Own Circle", in 1880: "Were not the Christian faith original with the Mighty One of Jacob, how could it stand? It goes against everything the world calls great, against a power of learning, against an age of formidable enchantment, investigation and uprooting. Freely look down therefore, upon our persons, our strength, our intellectual significance, if such you think you must. To esteem God to be all and before Him every man as nothing, is the Calvinistic Confession, which grants you the right to do so. But I beg, though you were our most violent opponent, do not withhold from the enthusiasm that inspires us the tribute of your respect. For the Confessional Standard, from which we have removed the dust, was once the soul's cry of a downtrodden nation; the Scripture, before whose authority we bow, has once been the comfort of your forbears; has not the Christ, Whose Name we honor, been the Inspirer, the Elect, the Worshiped One of your own fathers? Suppose that, according to everything that has been written in the sanctum of science and has echoed in the high places, suppose that according to your own confession, the Scripture were done for and Christianity a vanquished viewpoint, ... even then I still ask, has not that Christendom, in your own eyes, been historically too imposing, too majestic and too holy a phenomenon, shamefully now to fall in a heap, and to expire without honor? Is there then no more 'Noblesse oblige'? And shall a banner,

such as they bore away from Golgotha, be permitted to fall into the enemy's hands, so long as the uttermost to prevent it has not been tried, so long as one arrow is left for use, and a body-guard, however small, of Him Whom Calvary crowned, still lives within our borders?

To this question, "Never as God lives", has sounded in our souls. And to that "Never", as oath of loyalty to higher principle, I ask for an echo, an Amen, from every patriotic heart!"

And this deep personal experience of the power of Christ in the life strikes equally the key-note of the "Meditations". "Physician, heal thyself" is the demand made on the man who presumes to lead others in paths of virtue and godliness, in face of defects in his own life. This has silenced many a voice and paralyzed many an effort. This has forced into retirement the sensitive man, not wholly surrendered unto God, who could not lay himself bare to public gaze, at the cost of the esteem of men. It took humility and courage, for a man of such standing as Dr. Kuyper to keep on in his course of meditating in the public ear, on such themes as the struggles and defeats, the fallings and the risings again, the aspirations, discouragements and hopes of the soul, in its pursuit after "Holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord". But it made him the wise teacher, the sympathetic friend, the counsellor in holy matters, to thousands and thousands of hearts, that during more than forty years looked eagerly from week to week for that spiritual uplift, that spiritual feeding, encouragement and comfort, which his "meditations" brought them. If "there are not many able to write on the devotional life, because not many live it", of Kuyper it can be said: He was able to write on the devotional life, because he lived it.

In the heart of Christian Netherlands these "meditations" are imperishably enshrined. Shall this wealth of devotional and practical Christian thought be permanently barred from the English-speaking Christian world by the barrier of language? Already a summons from Japan has come for the translation into Japanese of the reecntly-published volume, His Decease at Jerusalem. *Is there no need with us, among the preachments of novel "Christs", of a fresh setting forth of Christ and Him crucified, of the "Christ of the Scriptures"?*

It is with no small pleasure, therefore, that we welcome the announcement, that the William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Mich., intends to give Dr. Kuyper's books a place in the English book-market. Together with the MacMillan Company of New York, they published the 110 Meditations on To Be Near Unto God. *From their own press the fifty Meditations on "The Passion and Death of our Lord", under the title:* His Decease at Jerusalem *have just come out. This volume:* Keep Thy Solemn Feasts, *makes the third volume in the series. It will shortly be followed by the 58 Meditations, under the title:* When Thou Sittest in Thine House.

So by this "venture for God" on the part of the Eerdmans Publishing House, the Translator seeks to cast the bread of Dr. Kuyper's making from the pure wheat of God's Word, in its English mould, upon the waters of the English-speaking world with the prayer, that in the lives of those who make it part of their spiritual food, it will produce results worthy to be laid at the Masters' feet, to the greater glory of God.

Walpole, Massachusetts.
June 20, 1928.

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I.

CHRISTMAS

I.

GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST

HERE was a reason why at Bethlehem the angels should sing the *Soli Deo Gloria,* that is, the: "Glory to God in the highest." Has not the outcome taught all but too bitterly, that at no christian feast is *the glory of God* so little remembered, as at the commemoration of Jesus' birth.

At Christmas-tide there is no end to the recitals of the *Babe* of Bethlehem, and of the *angels* that descended. By their beauty and loveliness these ever unique scenes in the fields of Ephrata and in the stable of Bethlehem, prove so attractive. And even many a preacher, alas, who has no more childlike faith in these wondrous narratives, so that to him they are nothing more than *poetry,* still feels himself enthralled by the philosophic thought, that in Jesus of Nazareth the life of God conflowed *with the life of men;* and in the pulpit at times this philosophy still makes him eloquent.

But under all these forms the charms of Christmas goes out *from the human.* It is *a human* child, that is welcomed in the manger. It is a being well-pleased *with men* that is overheard in the song which God's angels sang. It is our *human* nature, in which the Savior appears. It is a woman from among the children *of men,* from whom He is born. And all this Christmas mystery, what does it mean other than to prepare happiness for us *men?*

It is the Child, that attracts all eyes to itself. It is the salvation procured for *us* by that Child, in which the Christmas song exults.

But . . . . that "God so loved the world", as to give us that Child; that in the counsel *of God* this Savior was provided for us; that by *God's* act the "peace on earth" is given us; no, it is not denied, it is not contradicted; but who at Christmas-tide makes you feel that this is the cause of his gladness? Who counts with the *Soli Deo Gloria*, "To God alone the glory", when Christmas joy goes purling through the land?

And yet, at Christmas-tide the first note of the angel-song that rings anew in your ears, is: "Glory to God in the highest."

Those angels did not come of themselves, but they were sent of God. What they sang, was no improvisation, but a hymn of praise inspired in them by God Himself.

For once and always, for all times and all ages, so long as the form of this world shall not have passed away, it has been the will of God, that at Christmas, in a special manner, we should look away from all self-glory, and give glory alone to Him, the God of all mercies.

Most surely that Babe may and should enthrall you, and you may feel yourself attracted by all the charm of that Evangel of Christmas; *but not to forget your God with it,* and to enjoy the Holy Feast, without a lifting up of soul to Him, Who gave you both that Child, and in that Child all the riches of your Christmas Evangel.

He ever is the overflowing Fountain of this good. That Child, which the earth receives, is God's own

dear Son, the brightness of His glory and the express Image of His Substance.

And this greatest, this most precious of all gifts, God suffered to be born of a woman, even of Mary, *because He so loved the world.*

The shepherds who returned from the manger, did what the angels had commanded them to do, for they went back to their flocks "glorifying and praising God"; and when presently Simeon was privileged to take the holy Child up in his arms, *he, too, blessed God.*

The Babe in the manger does not yet speak; from that Babe no acts as yet go out. Speechless from Bethlehem it looks out into the world. And Mary herself does not divert you. She ponders, and listens, rather than offer to say a word. With the exception of the Song of the angels, Bethlehem presents a quiet, *silent* scene, as though everything invites you to think of *Him,* to lift up your heart to *Him,* to mingle love and praise as an offering to *Him,* Who in His counsel has thought out this wonder, and has made it real according to the riches of His mercies.

On the human side, therefore, at Bethelehem everything is in a state of humbleness and lowliness. A little town of no distinction; a stable without conveniences; a woman who is counted as of inferior rank; common shepherds in coarse garb of the field.

And, therefore, there is nothing in what is human here, that diverts you. All that makes Bethlehem a center of glory, comes *from above,* is from *God,* is *Divine* greatness.

It is not the loveliness of the Babe that should engage you, but in that Babe the Incarnate Word must be adored.

For had that Babe, already from the manger, been able to address you, He would not have directed your attention to His earthly mother, but to His *Father Who is in heaven;* to offer Him the glory and the praises of His Name.

No, not as *man,* but as *sinner* you are invited to Bethelehem's manger, and from that inner perception the "Glory to God in the highest" must arise.

All that emphasis that is laid upon the *human* exalts us, and raises the high thought in us, of the superiority of our human nature, and that this high and excellent nature of man is glorified by the coming of the Christ. This accounts for the frequency of the mention of the *Godhuman.* So it is *we,* that is *our* nature, that is crowned by the Divine.

But this becomes altogether different, when as a *sinner,* silently and reverently you make your approach to that manger.

For then there is nothing that exalts you or brings you an high opinion of yourself.

On the contrary, then it is all self-mortification, speechless confusion, and dismantling of soul.

Then you feel at once the distance between yourself, who are conceived and born in sin, and this Divine Babe that *"is conceived by the Holy Ghost."*

Then at that manger all that is human is *humbled.* Then the very *brightness* of that holy Child brings out the darkness of the *shadow* of sin, that rests upon yourself.

And what then enthralls and attracts is no more the emotional, it is no more the poetry, in which it all lies enswathed, but, altogether differently, it is the blessed knowledge, that he who *believes* in that Babe shall not *perish,* but have everlasting life.

Then Jesus is the lovely name, "all other names above", not because "the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes" appeals to your emotions, but because *He shall save His people from their sins.*

And, in that manger it is then the Son of God, Who was rich, and became poor for your sake, that by this human poverty of His earthly existence, He, O child of the Lord, might make you rich.

And so from personal experience you learn, what that "*glory to God in the highest*" once meant to God's angels, and what it must mean on your lips.

For your sin is not a pitiful sickness, which by its misery aroused Divine commiseration, without at the same time wounding Him in His majesty.

On the contrary, your sin arrayed itself against your God; nursed enmity against your God; cast Him off; and was a wandering far off from the God Who made you.

And this is the wondrousness, with singing about which the angels are never done, that notwithstanding all this, your Creator and your God, the Eternal Being in His majesty, has provided a counsel of salvation for you; and has fulfilled that counsel of His Mercy in Bethlehem.

Such is the overflowing fulness of the mercifulness of the Lord, that at the manger overwhelms you.

Your God at that manger of Bethlehem is *so great.*

For though from childhood you have been familiar with this mystery of Divine mercy, and therefore do not take it any more to be so enigmatical, yet this is the holy mystery which angels desired to look into, and from which still in dying all your consolation shall flow unto you.

The more deeply, therefore, you enter into this mystery, the richer your Christmas joy will be.

By this only does that manger become something *personal* to you. A gift of God to *your* soul. A gift, the richness of which is feasted upon by your soul.

With him who, with such spiritual application to his own soul, makes his approach to that manger, the glory of God must weigh upon his soul. And when from higher spheres you hear those angels raise the anthem of praise unto God, you can not remain silent but from the earth you, too, must stammer after them: To Him Who is in heaven, be all my praise and all my jubilation!

II.

ENMITY BETWEEN THY SEED AND HER SEED

F "peace on earth" God's angels sang at Ephrata, and no Christmas-tide has ever passed over the Church of Christ, but this song of heavenly exultation has been stammered after them by human lips.

At the manger of Bethlehem the whole Church gratefully and solemnly confesses: This Babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes, *is* our Peace!

That the name of that Babe would be "Peace", already from of old the Seer had foretold; and the holy apostle, who showed us the shadow of His image in Melchizedek, praises him as King of Salem, that is, King in the realm *of peace.*

"*Peace* through the blood of the Cross!" but which has come to us already from His conception, is ever at Christmas festivities the key-note of our heart.

And yet, with whatever high-sounding praises you may celebrate *holy peace,* it must not fail of notice, that in Scripture the Holy Ghost does not ring in the Christmas night with a jubilation of peace, but quite to the contrary with a song of vengeance and a proclamation of bitter enmity.

The first mention in Holy Writ of Christmas night is, when in Paradise Adam and Eve, but also Satan himself, who had tempted them, passed under God's terrible judgment.

In that moment, which dominated the lot of the whole world, it has pleased God, in the midst of the

terror of judgment, under which the transgressor succumbed, to announce the Christmas night and the manger of Bethlehem.

Already then, while Eve stood by and Adam heard it, God the Lord said to Satan: "I will put *enmity* between thee and the woman, and between they seed and her seed", and to this He added the prophecy of the most dreadful vengeance: "It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel"! (Gen. 3: 15.)

So in Paradise God spake of the woman, of a child that was to be born of a woman, and of this born child as of the Savior and Redeemer, Who would set men free from Satan's violence and cunning.

This is a prophecy of Bethlehem; a calling in from afar of Christmas night.

So in Paradise it is not the angelic host, but far more still, God Himself, Who makes that Christmas night to glimmer through from afar, and not *peace,* but *enmity,* and not "good-will toward men", but entire victory over Satan, till his head shall be bruised, is the key-note of His Divine prophecy.

Now the soft tones are good, and the sweet sounds of peace and loveliness harmonious, and therefore our ear listens with such tense joy and delight to the beautiful, friendly angel-song, but already in the Temple Simeon had the courage to let the sword glisten before the eye of the mother of the Lord, that terrible sword "that was to pierce through her own soul".

Yea, in Bethlehem the manger and the swaddling clothes are in shrill contradiction against that enchanting song of the angels. No satin nor bed of down awaits this King of peace, but what almost the poorest child finds prepared, is withheld from Him at His coming into the world.

And when presently Herod seeks the blood of that Babe, and His mother must flee with Him into Egypt, and shortly after in Bethlehem so many a sword is seen, "redstained" with the blood of the massacred innocents; and when, stronger yet, that Babe arrived at the years of a man, Himself declares: "I came not to send *peace,* but a *sword*" (St. Matt. 10: 34); and when at length all peace is gone, and that Babe of Bethlehem as One accursed and doomed to death, cries out His "Eli, Eli, Lama Sabachthani"!—confess, does not the whole Scripture spell, that merely to listen to the peace-anthem of angels at Ephrata is a rocking upon sounds, of which you neither understand the seriousness, nor the profound significance?

In connection with Bethlehem's Babe there are not *two,* but there are *three,* with whom you have to count.

There is not merely God above and the sinner upon earth, but there is also the old Satan from Paradise, who had worked separation between the two.

So there is always a twofold relation, one of which always stands diametrically opposed to the other. *Either* peace with God and enmity with Satan; *or* peace with Satan, and enmity with God.

This was the fall in Paradise, that the woman made peace with Satan, and hence came to stand in enmity *with God.* And this also is the joy of Christmas night, that in and through the Babe it again became: *Enmity* with Satan and peace with God. Not the one without the other, but these two ever inseparably together. The presence of the one is proof, by which to test the reality of the other.

Hence, it is shallow, superficial, and beneath the seriousness of the matter at Bethlehem, to speak of

peace only, and of peace merely, and explains why, he, who would be taught of Scripture, and would enjoy Christmas pleasures according to the Scripture, does not stop with that Peace-call from the lips of angels, but realizes that back of it lies the call of *enmity with Satan,* announced by God Himself in Paradise.

If Satan had his realm in hell alone, you might hold it in suspense; but such is not the case. When God had put man in "the garden of Eden to keep it," i. e. to make it inaccessible to the encroachment of Satan, Eve tempted Adam to let him in. In false coveteousness she drew back the bolt of the gate she had to watch. So Satan has obtained access to this world; and from that hour the realm of Satan has not been confined to hell, but in all sorts of dreadful evil has been extended upon earth. By this, in an evil sense, this earth has become "world", "worldly" in her endeavor, "worldly" in her development, and that world has come to stand so pronouncedly over against the living God, that at Christmas also the holy apostle asks: "Know ye not, O people of God, that the *friendship* of the world is enmity with God?" (James 4, 4.)

Therefore our Christian people, who seek deeper paths, can have no peace with the Christmas tree. For however lovely the intent and however kindly it presents itself, the Christmas tree does not lead up to Christ, *but away from Him.* It overshadows the seriousness, which is of all importance here. With its gleams and its colors it outshines the somber side of the Chritmas mystery. It does not internalize, but it externalizes. At the Christmas tree even the scoffer can have pleasure. And the child will sing of Jesus, o, he will sing anything you say, so long as

presently he may carry off your valuable presents. But meanwhile he is so mightily impressed by that tree and by its lights and its colors, that with no thousandth part of the attention of his soul, does he think of Jesus, Who sits above at the right hand of the Father, and of the lights that glisten there in glory.

No, the tree, to which the Holy Scripture leads us back on Christmas night, is not the heathen pine tree with its ribbons and its lights, but is that other tree, which once stood in Paradise, and was begnawed by the worm, and with whose withering the glory of our human life has paled.

There, at *that sin-tree,* God the Lord takes His stand, when He unfolds to us and to our children the prophecy of Bethlehem's mystery; and there, at that withered tree, which in its withering is become the symbol of the withering and the dying away of our soul, there the Lord announces the coming of the Son, the birth of that Babe, that was to bring us peace with Him, yes, but through the *enmity,* which He would put between Satan and our heart.

And now, as is self-evident, it would be folly, at Bethlehem's manger to think more of our *enmity* with Satan, than of our *peace* with God. But yet, if our exultant song of "*peace* with God" shall be something more than a sound, that *enmity* against Satan must immediately follow from it.

To him who is adrift upon the sweet sound of "peace" without a more serious background, Christmas joy is an oasis in the wilderness of life. At Christmas he steps out for a moment from the conflict of his heart and from the struggle of life. And now transported into that unnatural, unreal state, *he plays a kind of angelplay,* but it stands out-

side of the conflict of his heart and of the reality of what life offers him.

And such Christmas keeping brings no profit, but injury. It is the misuse of the manger of Bethlehem, to enjoy a spiritual relaxation; in order presently, after the pleasure has been enjoyed, to return to a life, into which Christmas does not dovetail, to which it does not belong, between which it came in as an heavenly appearance.

And such our Christmas must not be. This is to mark the mystery of the Incarnation as though it were no Incarnation. For Christmas is an incoming of the Mediator into the reality of our existence, of our life, of our sunken-awayness, of our conflict and of our deadly oppression.

His coming in Bethlehem does not stand by itself alone, but is the first step on a way, upon which presently the second shall follow with Satan in the wilderness, and the third in Gethsemane, and the fourth in the descent into hell, and the fifth in the death on the Cross, and the sixth in the grave.

Our Christmas is not disposed to the flippancy and thoughtlessness of superficial merriment. On the contrary. At that manger indeed begins *our* exaltation, but *His humiliation.* That manger itself and those swaddling-clothes betoken it. No room for Him in the inn.

And will it do, at that first step on the way of His humiliation, which is only charming by reason of His beauty, to suffer yourself to be tragically enthralled? Will it do, because you became *rich,* to forget, that here His *poverty* begins; His becoming *poor* to make you *rich*?

And if you are repelled by this yourself, do you then not understand the seriousness of our fathers, who were afraid of keeping Christmas, from very

fear, that the call of *Peace* should mislead, and with it the enmity with Satan be forgotten?

By taking on "the flesh and blood of children", the Mediator has more strongly than by anything else, announced *Peace* to you, but has also roused the *enmity* of Satan and of the world against Himself.

That enmity begins already at the manger and from out Jerusalem mutters against Him at the very moment that the angelic host proclaims the *Peace on earth.*

That manger is intolerable to Satan, with that manger his dominion comes to an end. He knows, that this Babe is come, "to destroy *his* works, the works of the Devil," and that by this Babe one day his head shall be bruised.

But one thing he also knows, he may first bruise the heel of that Babe.

This now is all his intention.

He must go under, but this one vengeance is left him. And already at Bethlehem Satan thirsts after the blood of the Son of God, that shall flow on Golgotha, even though he knows, that in that blood he shall drink in death unto himself.

And if you so understand it, o, then our Christmas is no longer a drop of oil upon the waters, but fits into the real life of God's Church, as it has been known in all ages.

The Christ born and thereby the enmity of Satan broken loose against the Church.

First the combat to the death upon Golgotha. And after that the endless struggle to destroy the Church of Christ. The effort, that speaks in the massacre of Bethlehem's innocents, endlessly repeated.

So then the reverse should also be present with you.

Satan your enemy, but you too alive with enmity against Satan.

All who at the manger of Bethlehem joyously sing an angel-song, and meanwhile continue life on a footing of decorous peace with Satan, and of decorous peace with the unrighteous world, their song does not ascend from lips incapable of deceiving.

Love for Jesus is not a matter of the emotions, neither is it a play of your imagination.

Love for the Babe of Bethlehem *is* at the same time *hatred* of sin, *hatred* of Satan, and *hatred* of the unrighteousness, which in this world Satan supports. Both go equally steadily and simultaneously up and down as cold makes the thermometer go down and warmth makes the quicksilver go up in the glass tube.

And therefore, would you at Christmas-tide trace the tie in your own soul that binds you to the Mediator, investigate deeply and very deeply in your inmost parts, whether it has yet pleased God, to put in you this strong enmity, which He in Paradise has promised.

Would you bless your chidren, then do not entice them by ribbons and lights and presents to an outward merry-making, but imbue them with repugnance of sin, breach with the world, enmity against Satan, and see, how with it and by it simultaneously *real* love for Jesus will increase.

And when even at Christmas-tide you hear of opposition and of the bitternesses with which all kinds of inimical powers turn themselves against God's Church and against God's people, o, brothers and sisters, do not take an attitude as though this were strange to you, and neither wonder at it.

Enmity is paid with enmity. And if enmity against Satan is put in your heart, what wonder then, that Satan hates you in return.

There is but One, Who requites *enmity* with the kiss of peace; the Merciful One, Who has given you, that were enemies, *peace* by His dear Son.

And, there is but one generation upon earth, which when reviled, reviles not again, and when it suffers, refrains from threatening: even the generation of the children of God, that learned mercifulnesses from Him, Who became our Peace!

III

"WONDERFUL, COUNSELLOR, THE MIGHTY GOD, THE EVERLASTING FATHER, THE PRINCE OF PEACE"

N the manger of Bethlehem a *Child* is given, a *Child of man* is born unto us.

To what purpose?

Why did Immanuel not appear at once in *matured* form? Why was it, that the Son of God had to annihilate Himself to the neediness, to the powerlessness of the babe *at mother's breast*, yea, to the hiddenness of the yet *unborn* babe? The Church of Christ answers this question with the unanimous confession, that in this the judgment was passed upon *your* conception and *your* birth. All the way back of your birth, yea, even to your conception the root fiber of sinful corruption twines itself around your human life, and therefore into that most deeply hidden beginning of your human existence, He, Who was to be your Savior, had to enter.

The question: "What profit dost thou receive by Christ's holy conception and nativity?" the Heidelberger answers with this entirely correct, far too little considered, and yet so comforting reply: "That with His innocence He covers in God's sight your sins, *wherein you were conceived and brought forth.*"

So the mystery of Bethlehem is only for *"the people that sit in darkness"*, that feel the deep shadow of original sin from their birth and concep-

tion come upon them, as a dark night; and that *under this* shadow they are most deeply troubled, and sigh, that evil dwells in their nature itself, and that from their first beginning, yea, from their very conception, their is no finger-breadth and no line, in which sin was not there before them, to involve in sin before God their existence itself as man.

And to him who has a perception of this, and feels oppressed by reason of this ominous darkness, at Bethlehem a Light hath appeared in the darkness. For that "*Child* born unto us" speaks of a salvation which traces the poison back to our infancy. That *Child* conceived of the Holy Ghost, extends the salvation of our God back of our conception.

And this Child is named with five names, every one of them rich of content. To the people that know the darkness, a "great Light" appears, and He, in Whom that light appears, is called *Wonderful, Counsellor,* the *Mighty God,* the *everlasting Father,* and *Prince of peace.*

To have you understand the meaning of that *Wonderful,* the prophet points you to Israel's history in the days of Gideon. Not for the sake of Gideon, but because in Israel's struggle and distress and deliverance there lies outlined figuratively the struggle and the suffering and the redemption of all the Lord's people.

Israel too at the time was under the cloud of darkness. Midian had invaded the land, had massacred the people, committed violence and engaged in pillage, and there was no one able to bring deliverance out of the hand of Midian.

For only by turning sword against sword, spear against spear, and arrow against arrow, did deliver-

ance out of Midian's hand seem possible. And lo, when every troubled soul in Israel expected deliverance from the crossing of the sword, all unexpectedly God wrought deliverance by means of pitchers that were broken and by torches that were swayed to and fro by the men under Gideon.

That was *Wonderful.* When it is expected from the sword, dripping with blood, and it comes from a pitcher that you break.

Then it goes against all form of thought, and it comes to pass by that whereof no one had a surmise. And so likewise this "Child that is born unto us" is first of all called *Wonderful* because the salvation did not come in the way wherein every one who had longed for redemption had hoped it would come, but from a side toward which no eye had turned. You had expected it from the wise men of the world, from the thinkers of the age, from the nobles among the people, and now, look at that *Babe. That* is your Immanuel. That Babe in swaddling-clothes, in Him is all your salvation.

Wonderful is when nature must give up; when the course of things seems impotent; when from our human existence, from our human race, and from all the treasures that hide in our humanity, no help can come; and when outside of natural and human power, help comes to you from God.

From His wondrous grace, through His almightiness!

The same is unfolded closer still in that second name: *Counsellor.*

There is counsel, when in common need, they who together are bowed down under oppression or anxiety, *take counsel,* plan *counsel,* provide *counsel.*

Again, there is counsel in need, when at the

critical moment some wise man lifts up his voice and gives counsel to those who are desperate.

And so in this common need of sin counsel had been sought and counsel had been the theme of keen deliberation. By each one for himself and by many together. And time and again among all sorts of people and under all sorts of skies a wise man had arisen, to give counsel to the people, and to press his counsel upon them.

Even where there was no deeper knowledge of sin nor even a surmise of doomworthiness because of guilt or of corruption, a general sense of homesickness after a happier state of things took hold of people, a longing to escape the decline of human power. And then there came law-givers and wise men, moral philosophers and judges, educators and leaders of spirits, who each contributed their invention, their remedy, their counsel.

This was called *Wisdom,* but a wisdom which every time again turned into folly.

Sin lay concealed too deep in the marrow of our soul, and no counsel that was not able to fathom that depth could survive.

But now see here this *Babe,* that comes to put all counsel to shame, and in which the altogether only counsel of salvation, the only saving counsel in the need of your soul, embodied lies before you.

Here is the *Counsel,* and that Counsel *realized,* that Counsel *executed,* and in that Counsel the prophecy of a salvation, which in no coming hour of need will leave you confused or ashamed, and which will prove itself to be *Counsel* to, and across death and grave, yea, to all eternity.

Thus here again the same antithesis.

As in the name *Wonderful* it is the almightiness of God's help that comes down in the midst of the

absolute helplessness of your human nature, here it is the *Wisdom* of God that glistens gloriously over against the infatuation of your human devising.

With you the desperation, from Him the Counsel that saves you.

And therefore there is no part for you in that Counsel, and by that Counsel for you no deliverance, save as you dare to lay your hand upon the mouth, and dare to despise the wisdom of the world, to glory in none other than in Him, Who of God is made unto us *wisdom* first, and only after that, and as such, justification, sanctification and perfect redemption. (1 Cor. 1:30.)

That Babe "*Wonderful*", in which the *Counsel* of salvation became flesh, is called therefore in the third place: *The Mighty God,* for the device of counsel is not enough, that counsel must be carried out; and the struggle, incident to this, is dreadful.

And if on account of this, even after you have heard of this heavenly counsel, you should ask anxiously: "But who shall show us this good?" the Scripture anticipates you, and announces to you the third name of that Babe. He is the *Mighty God,* or better still, as it literally stands: *God-hero.*

Terrible are the powers, that press up against you; dreadful to see the powers that stand over against you. The thoughtless do not observe this, for the "gates of hell" are not visible to the naked eye. But he who received spiritual light, and by the shining of that light begins to discover, what on the background, in the dark distance, comes stealing towards us as evil ominous power, waylays us, aims at our ruination and eternal perdition, trembles at the thought. For you repeat them as hollow sounds: *Satan, sin* and *world;* but he who came to have deal-

ings with them, knows well that these are no hollow sounds, but three tremendous, sneaking powers, which take you by the throat before you know it and poison your heart before you are aware of it.

Against these three soul-destroying powers the struggle has gone on as long as sorrow for sin on earth has troubled the heart, and home-sickness after freer, purer life has been known in the human heart.

Fought and struggled in lonesome hiddenness and in the market-place of life, by men and women, by Jews who knew Jehovah, and by heathen who sought God in their idol.

The masses at large yielded willingly to sin. But always and everywhere there has been a small number, there were always a few giant-figures in spiritual things, in whom common grace glorified itself in a special manner, and who rowed against the stream of wantonness and sensuality, that they might take hold again of the seriousness of life.

But it brought no lasting avail.

In the end the strongest had succumbed, and the bravest had been swallowed up in the stream.

Hero courage from our nature, strength from our human existence, could gain no lasting victory, because the ground itself on which one struggled sank away from under foot, and no broken human power could withstand strong Satan.

But now see this little Child! In that little Child hides the spiritual Nimrod, who shall be as a mighty hero before the Lord.

That little Child shall once fight as no child of man ever fought before. That little Child shall struggle with Satan as no sinner has ever struggled. And Him neither Satan, nor sin nor world shall be able to overcome, because He and He alone is not merely the *man*-hero, but the *God*-hero, Who shall

cause every enemy of God and man to bend before His Divine superiority.

Wonderful, Counsellor, but also: Mighty God, and therefore your *powerlessness* to save yourself placed in clearest light by His ability to save unto the uttermost. (Heb. 7, 25.)

When I am weak, then He in me is strong.

And he alone who looking to this Mighty God refrains from every powerless effort of his own, is gloriously saved by this Mighty God.

"The everlasting Father" is Immanuel's fourth name. A name which naturally does not indicate that eternity itself is of the Son. Scripture clearly teaches that all things are *of* the Father and *through* the Son.

This "Father of eternity" points to something altogether different. It stands over against the dreadful power of sin *in Time*.

Sin has not only nestled itself in our heart, but also in our past and in the past of our race. It has sought its support in the customs on which Time has put its stamp, in the morals which Time has confirmed, in the institutions which Time has called into life, in the opinions and ideas to which Time has given entrance.

So from Time a sinful power has sprung up in tradition, a power that presses down as with the weight of lead, and from which no man can wrest himself away entirely otherwise than by falling a victim to overwrought madness.

This terrible power of the *past* works its aftermath in your conscience, in the evil report that is perpetuated, in bodily strength that is broken, in good that is lost.

Yea, even in your person, in your soul and body this evil power of the *past* has established itself, in hereditary diseases, in hereditary sinful character-traits, in original sin and hereditary ruin.

If as by one act you could shake off from yourself that *past,* everything that lies back of you, and works out in you its aftermath even from far distant generations, you would at once feel yourself free and redeemed.

But this you can *not* do.

As with copper chains that past is bound to your feet, and you can take no step on the way without dragging it along with you.

But now see the little Child of Bethlehem. Over that little Child Immanuel Time has no power. No, He rules Time with the majesty of the Divine life which bears eternity in itself.

He goes back of Time and back of the beginning of the dust-particles of earth; and when once Time shall be no more, and at last every time-piece be run down, He shall still be eternally Himself.

And therefore there is help with Him against the evil power of Time, against the terrible oppression of the *past,* and equally so against anxiety for the future.

As "Father of eternity" He encloses Time from beginning to end, and he who may know that little Child, and possess Him, is redeemed from the tyranny of heredity, from the yoke of tradition, from the plagues of the past, from the dominion of the latest moments.

Finally, that little Child is called the *Prince of peace,* the antithesis of Solomon as prince of peace over against David as fighting hero.

The prince who wages wars, for war's sake,

consumes the goods and the blood of his people, and wades through streams of blood and tears to fame and glory.

In the days of David the people were hard pressed and spent their vital forces in constant wars.

But it was altogether different during Solomon's reign, when all the people were at rest, and lived on their spoils, and sat under their own vine and figtree.

Then it was no longer the prince, who spent the treasures of his people, but the king full of majesty, who gave out portions from his own rich treasures to those who were in need, and was able to bless unto length of days all the people belonging to his realm.

And such also is the case with this wondrous little Child.

For Immanuel also there is conflict, but one in which not the people pour out their blood for Him, but He pours out His heart's blood for His people. And so He too is our Solomon, Who possesses all the booty, has obtained all the treasure of His suffering, and now lives as Prince of peace to bless us, to enrich us with His treasures, and to make us enjoy wealth of soul from the spoils which He captured from Satan.

For us the indication, that *not we* must try to bring Him anything, but that *He* brings everything to us, and that even our best works, can never enrich His spoils, but that from His immeasurable treasures they have been taken for us and have been apportioned to us.

Thus these five glorious names, *Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Father of eternity, Prince of peace* are nothing but the bundle of rays, in which shines forth the richness of Immanuel's inner being and the fruit of His work.

To know these five glorious names, both from the experience of one's own soul, and from the fulness of His glory is: *To know Him and the power of His resurrection.*

It is, standing at the Crib of Bethlehem, to understand the significance of "that little Child that is given unto us".

And in this the child of God of himself is *daily* engaged. Of that infinite fulness of Immanuel he understands as yet but so small a part, especially so small a part with empirical experience of soul, that it is his daily prayer, that he might every time learn *something more* of that treasure which is hid in his Savior.

He who only when Christmas is near, loses himself in that world of heavenly thoughts, may have heard "the sound of the King" from afar, doorkeeper at the palace of that King he as yet has not become.

But Christmas intends, to gather again the thoughts of the Lord's people, and direct them again more strongly to Immanuel. Christmas reproaches you with healing, while shaming, power, that at other times you dwelt so lamentably little with your soul and senses near to Immanuel. It compels you, by concentration of your inner life at the sight of the little Child that is born, to make good at least something of former neglect. And it also exhorts you when presently Christmas is once more gone, not to wander again so for away from Him with your heart.

And Christmas does not reach this end, when you are drawn merely to the manger and look upon the swaddling-clothes. That glorious power only goes out to you, when with the searching eye of your soul you enter into the richness, the all else excelling significance of that little Child, and not rehearse His virtues from memory, but repeat them from what

you have experienced regarding them in your own heart.

In so large a sense Christ is deserted by the people whom He once blessed. He is so lamentably forgotten by thousands and tens of thousands, whom He has baptized with His baptism.

O, let then at least among His people that still know Him and confess Him, something awaken again of *the first love* for Immanuel.

Sinner's love from the reconciled heart is the only offering that can please Him.

For that holy fragrance let the incense and the myrrh from your inner life be placed upon His altar.

IV

THOUGH HE WAS RICH, HE BECAME POOR

UR people at large are becoming more and more unfit, to keep the joyous feast of Bethlehem. Two* free holidays are still on every hand a matter of desire. To be free from work has something about it, that charms the child as well as the man of years. To bring somewhat more light into the darkness of these somber, mid-winter days, cheers home and heart.

And when, agreeable with foreign custom, a Christmas tree appears in the midst of merrymakers, and all sorts of presents are to be picked from its branches, even in entirely unbelieving families Christmas joy will reach such heights, that unconsciously one drinks in poetry and even at times sees remembrances of the world of angels, which long since were outworn, loom up on the background of the depopulated field of his imagination.

Christmas *trees*, Christmas *cakes*, Christmas *presents*, Christmas *parties*, Christmas *songs*, Christmas *books*, truly, all these abound in overwhelming multiplicities. Even far more than ever before. Only the Christmas *babe*, the holy *Child of God* has disappeared from such Christmas keeping.

Sometimes a Madonna with the Christchild on her arm is still tolerated, not because of what this Babe was and is to us, but because of the beautiful appear-

* The Dutch keep two Christmas days; two at Easter, and two at Pentecost.—TRANSLATOR.

ance, in which the artist enchantingly produces his image before our eyes.

And amid all this noisy Christmas keeping, and this less chaste and less elegant Christmas amusement, christian society at large begins more and more to carry the impression of a mother at the cradle, but a cradle from which her child has been stolen.

The degree of this unbelief *differs*. Here a false preacher, who still abuses God's holy house, by assailing from the pulpit the beautiful story of Christmas. There a "pious" modernist, who for his own benefit revives the Christmas story in all its details, but only as poetry, as facinating human ideality. Yonder a cynical mocker, who celebrates Christmas by distributing among his table companions shameful glosses on the mystery of Bethlehem. Or else a righteous misanthrope of our age, who lets *you* celebrate what you will, but in whose recollection or perception, so far as he is concerned, Christmas or the Christmas-myth has no more count.

But though not all unbelief, that robs the Babe from the manger of Bethlehem, is of one origin and of the selfsame tendency, yet this criticism, this poetry, this mockery, and this indifference are all alike in this, that for our troubled and impoverished world, they have extinguished the beautiful light of Bethlehem.

Over against this, indeed, stands the Christian world in a narrower sense. And in these narrower circles there is even bolder confession, more openhearted rejoicing, and the Christmas note resounds more warmly, than when the former century came to its close.

Especially the Sunday school did wonders.

The parochial schools followed suit.

Our treasury of Song increased itself. Engravings

multiplied themselves. Festivity after festivity is announced in these circles at Christmas-time.

One lives, one enjoys, one loses himself in it, and freely it may be said, that since the Reformation there was never so much made of Christmas as now.

Also because the poor are more generously remembered, compassion is more abundant, and seeks to prepare gladness for the child of the poor for the sake of the Babe of Bethlehem.

But what are these small circles of confessors in the face of that broad, masslike circle of those who have renounced the Savior of the world, or have allowed Him to die away from their heart. Moreover, what little depth frequently, what little seriousness, little spiritual sense there is in this Christian keeping of Christmas. And likewise, what striking similarity there is at times between Christmas keeping in a Christian family and in an unbelieving household, when a Christmas-tree is carried into the banquet hall of either as a Christmas gift.

Truly, here also it is not all gold that glitters.

And when you take the two figures of Bethlehem, on one side Mary, absorbed in quiet, blessed worship, with the expression on her face of overwhelming spiritual wealth; and on the other side the three heathen princes, who with great pomp, with servants and with camels, come to present their gold and myrrh, is it too much to say, that in the olden days our churches exhibited more the image of Mary, and now perhaps more the image of these busy, active, rich princes at the manger?

Of course, these wise men from the East had a place there; and by no manner of means would we silence this more noisy cheer on our Christmas days.

Children must be made happy in other ways than people of years and of richer experience. According to one's position in life, his exhibition of joy assumes a more restful or noisier form. And friendly laughter and the expression of exuberant joy, which at Christmas-time plays on the face of thousands and thousands of children, betray a wealth of enjoyment for the human heart, of which it must not be robbed, and which, even if it were merely by way of propaganda, always stands related to the little Child of Bethlehem.

Thus let our children keep the feast in their own way. Let good things be portioned out to them. Let bounties be carried to the dwellings of our poor. Let light and joy be in your homes at Christmas-time. And do not criticize too sharply, when in this festive joy something mingles that bears no close investigation; or when a note resounds, which less pure, at least is not borrowed from the motive of Bethlehem.

All this does no harm, and does not spoil our circles, provided God's more deeply initiated children, the whiles little ones jubilate so loudly, understand jubilation *in the depth of the soul;* allow the glow of infinite love to operate in their inmost self; and know how to experience all the blessedness of the Christmas-mystery in their heart.

Thus spiritually to keep Christmas can not be the part of many; for only by deeper insight are you enabled so to do; and only after riper experience you obtain spiritual capacity for this.

But when you know deeper ways, and have not lost yourself in false mysticism, the wondrous narratives, of all the rich revelations, that come to us from Nazareth and Bethlehem, must every time be more deeply understood, be more fully admitted in you, and ever richer comfortings must flow therefrom for your own

heart. A comforting, which of itself in turn generates fruit. A disposition of your inner life, which is bound to utter *praise*, and can not refrain from *loving*.

And though there are but *few* who know this deeper life, yet it is they who are the salt, that can avert corruption from our Christmas.

In your more busy ways of feasting the Martha is in evidence; in that more quiet spiritual celebration the image of Mary looms up before you; and only where *both these together* enrich our Christmas, the keeping of this feast of jubilation lives on as a *power* in the Church.

The antithesis, in which in our times the course of the world places itself to keep Christmas, is very noteworthy.

A century and more ago this antithesis was an altogether different one. The wild cry, that went forth everywhere was the cry for *freedom*. Liberation from every band was demanded. No more attendance at church. No Word of God to bind you. No God before Whom one should kneel. No Christ Whom one should worship. And reports have been abroad, that on Christmas day sermons were preached on the best method of feeding cattle in the stable.

But now, at the close of the nineteenth century, it is altogether different. It is no longer the cry for freedom, for one is as free as a bird in the air or as a fish in the sea; but now the wild cry is abroad to make the *rich* poorer and to make the *poor* more rich.

Liberty stands higher, for liberty is a spiritual good, and therefore the struggle of a century ago, though the inspiration of the Evil One mingled itself with it, was ever yet ideal in its starting-point. But now that ideal is lost. The temples of Mammon, with

the Rothschilds as high priests, have not been erected for nought in all the capital cities of Europe. The whole tone of life has become *materialistic*, and as a result of this, one sings along with the other in this *materialistic* tone.

Even political rights are scoffed at, and are merely used as means, to chase after a material portion.

On the glowing field of gold and silver the battle is now fought to the end.

Thus the evil spirit of our time faces Christmas altogether differently from the demon of the French Revolution and the Rationalism all dominant at the time.

In 1789 the Cross would with malicious anger have been trampled under foot, at the end of the nineteenth century Satan appears with an "It is written" on his lips, and appeals to Scripture and pleads for the Christ, and presents himself, as though he actually aimed to continue, what once the Babe in Bethlehem began.

Even that Babe of Bethlehem still arrests the common attention. Not "because there is brought unto us the glad tidings of great joy, that there is born the Savior of the world, Who shall save us from our sins." No, but because that Babe was poor, utterly poor, born in a stable; and put down not in a royal luxurious cradle, but in a manger of ox or ass.

Mary, too, a *poor* woman, Joseph a man of the *lower* class.

And then that brilliant scene, when those rich men came, to offer their Eastern treasures of gold and precious stones and fragrant herbs to that *poor* little Child, and that *poor* family; forsooth, it is bound to appeal to the heart of our times.

For behold, the materialistic spirit, that is abroad, would have it just *so:* Whoever has gold or silver, should of his own accord lay it at the feet of the poor.

And is there nothing in this seeming parallelism, that addresses itself to you?

Of course, all such comparisons are false through and through.

Christ, Who was rich and made Himself poor, can never be misused as the ideal of him, who is poor and wants to become rich.

This is mutually antagonistic.

But . . . . . there lies in the manger of Bethlehem also this other thought: that He Who was rich, became poor, *that you might become rich.*

And though this is intended spiritually, it is nevertheless clothed in a form that is borrowed from the material life, so that that crib declares unto you, that he who is rich, and is able to look complacently upon the poverty of others, without the impulse astir in him to lessen that poverty, and wherever possible, to remove it, can not with a quiet conscience kneel at that manger of Bethlehem.

A Christmas-tree in a rich family, laden with all sorts of beautiful presents for those who already know not what to do with their abundance of gifts, is a parody.

He who at Christmas time feels the urge to do good, *because he is rich,* should make that urge of his love go out *to the poor;* or by his very generosity the crib of Bethlehem is mocked.

And when our christian society asks itself, whether after a struggle of eighteen centuries, under her inspiration and glittering luxuries a condition has been born, which with respect to the mutual relation of rich and poor, typifies what in Bethlehem's crib was revealed . . . . . alas, is there then no cause for Rachel again to lift up her lamentation and the voice of her weeping, and does it not behoove us with shamefaced-

ness to confess before God, that the need, which on every side calls for help, and the misery, which makes its lamentations heard, and the lack, that cries, mingle bitter dissonances in our Christmas jubilation.

No, we do not interpret *materially,* what in Bethlehem was intended *spiritually,* but does that allow you to ignore the relation established by God between the material and the spiritual?

Did not the Christ, Who preached His sermon on the mount, perform the miracles of His compassionateness, even feeding the multitudes? Has not that same Christ instituted in His Church alongside the office of the preacher, also the office of benevolence? And where we grant, that too great wealth renders the spirit dull before God, is it not equally true, that too great misery, when hunger gnaws in the stomach, renders one deaf to the hunger of the soul?

It is true, you can not equalize conditions in this evil world. That can not be done and never will be done. But though to the end of time there will be rich and poor, can it ever be God's ordinance, that some are so *over*-rich and others so bitterly, bitterly poor?

And when you say, that in Israel, too, (think of the rich man and Lazarus) such crying antitheses prevailed; you should never forget, what awful judgment in that very parable Jesus pronounced upon that rich man, who allowed Lazarus to starve.

And yet, however strongly we may cause this string also to vibrate at Christmas-time, this note must not falsify our Christmas celebration.

The riches, of which Christmas sings, are not material, but *spiritual,* and do not glisten in decora-

tions and dainties, but in what brings balsam for the wounds of your soul.

And this depends solely, on what in your eye constitutes real happiness and highest merit. Is it the garment, that you hang about your shoulders, the house in which you dwell, the splendor of your banquet, or the gold that rings in your purse; then let the curtain drop before the manger of Bethlehem, for in behalf of these that Babe provides you nothing.

But if you say: No, not my house and not my garment; not my gold, and even not my body; but the hidden man that dwells in me; my spiritual being, the soul that dwells in my body, with all the spiritual wealth and the whole spirtual world, and the powers of eternity that belong to it, *that* is man's highest good, his real honor, and his true riches; then lift the curtain, which the world has dropped before Bethlehem's manger, and drink in life, drink in joys of soul from what by means of that manger of Bethlehem that Babe brings you to possess, and from what that angelic choir, that sings of peace on earth, makes you see and overhear.

Then keep not silent, but lift your voice in the streets, and in the name of that glorious God-Child proclaim it far and wide, that the evil demon of our age misleads poor mankind, and causes it to impoverish and to petrify, and that it assaults and violates the human worth, which God still spared to glisten in *our* generation.

Protest then with all the power and all the talent, wherewith God has entrusted you, against that evil tendency of spirits, which only asks, how mortal man can enjoy himself here for sixty, seventy years, and feels no concern about the nameless suffering and the awful horror, that age upon age, and to eternity, shall

rest upon a race, that has dared to cast out its God and disdainfully to reject the gold of heaven.

Feel then your calling deeply, and come up to the high level of the same; of placing ever and again over against the matter-deification of our age, and its sole reckoning with man's body and with the gold of earth, the holy language of the manger of Bethlehem, as a witness unto it.

And that this word of yours, hollow of sound, might not go in one ear to go out at the other, but might enter into hearts, arrest souls, and prove itself a power in the conscience, live yourself by Bethlehem and not by Mammon, in your own heart, in your own home, and in the settings wherein God has placed you.

What would it have cost the Almighty, so to have overwhelmed every one without distinction with material wealth that, satiated with life, every one of you would have sunk down exhausted by the side of your treasures.

But He, Who knoweth of what we are made, and Who knew, how under all that satiety of riches our inner, real man would impoverish, become unnerved and moribund, did not give gold to us all, but gave the Son of His love to the world.

And he who was permitted to lay hold on Christ, though he remained poor after the world, is not he far richer than the richest millionaire-king in America, because he is rich in his God?

V

"THERE WENT OUT A DECREE FROM CAESAR AUGUSTUS"

HERE are two old Romans, whom for centuries all christendom has known, and who till the Lord's return shall maintain their peculiar standing in Christ's church the most commonly known *Pontius Pilate,* because his name occurs in the *Articles of Faith;* and after him *Caesar Augustus,* from the Christmas narrative of St. Luke two.

Even now, when Mission work is done at Java or in China, in the South Sea Islands or in Corea, the peoples that have scarcely any knowledge of old-Rome, are definitely taught the names of these two men. Of "Caesar Augustus under whom the decree went out", and of Pontius Pilate, under whom Christ "suffered".

And that we take these two names together, not Augustus apart and Pilate apart, but the two combined, is correctly done, because the governor did nothing save represent the emperor. Actually it is only his *imperial power* that in both names stands over against the kingly crown of the "holy Child" in Bethlehem's manger.

For surely, there plays and speaks a wondrous coincidence in the fact, that Augustus who knew nothing of Jesus and to the end of his days thought not of Jesus, from far off Rome "made a decree to go out", by which Mary went to Bethlehem, so that finally Micah's prophecy of Bethlehem-Ephrata is

fulfilled, but yet this seemingly accidental fulfilment of prophecy is here not the main interest.

There lies expressed in the combination of Rome and Bethlehem, and in that of *Jesus'* and *Augustus'* names a much deeper sense and far mightier word of God, whether from the manger of Bethlehem you go back to Bethlehem's past in Isaac's days, or whether you bring to mind the majesty with which at length Jesus' name broke the power of Rome's emperor, and still bridles the insolence of all imperial superiority and finally destroys it.

Compared with the glory of the presently glorified Christ, the power of the empire recedes in the shadow in such a way, that for the eternal-youthful Bethlehem you would almost forget ancient Rome.

And yet this should not be.

For in old Rome, there has once shone a work of art of our God.

That too must be remembered.

And therefore in His Word God lets the name of *emperor Augustus* be written at the head of the Christmas narrative, and presently He makes the name of Pontius Pilate to be inserted in the brief formula of Faith which the whole Church of Christ, century upon century, among all nations and under all skies, shall confess.

Your Savior did not merely have to shed His blood for you, to wash you of your sins in that blood, but He had to die under sentence, i. e. He had to be sentenced by the *worldly judge*.

He could have had His blood shed by assassination. In a riot some one could have struck Him down. Like John Baptist in Machaerus' fort, Jesus could have been beheaded in one of the dungeons of Jerusalem's prisons.

And then too His blood would have flowed, but in this way His blood would not have redeemed you.

In His self-offering *right* had to come to its own. You had to be made *righteous.* God's violated right had to be restored. And therefore Jesus had to be sentenced by the judge, that at the *judgment-seat of the Almighty* you might go out free.

And therefore in your articles of Faith stands Pontius Pilate, the *judge,* named by name.

Consider well, *not* Herod, and *not* Caiaphas, but Pontius Pilate, the Roman, just because the Roman judge at the time in Israel had the supreme power to dispose *of life and death.*

The Sanhedrin might cast out Jesus as an atheist, Caiaphas might deliver Him, Herod might allow Him to be mocked, yet all this was merely impotent wrath. To put Jesus to death according to law (right) and in exercise of his official position as judge, Rome's Governor alone could do, because at Rome the emperor was enthroned, and because the land of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob at the time was subject to the emperor of Rome.

Thus, that at the beginning of the Christmas narrative, first emperor Augustus is referred to, points directly to Gabbatha and Golgotha, and in connection herewith to your justification, inasmuch as Christ is *legally* sentenced to death.

To be able to justify you, your Savior had to be born under *this* and under no other jurisdiction.

Rome's emperor must needs have the right, to cause "a decree to go forth" to the land, where Jesus was to come into the world.

So read Luke 2:1, and you read yet more in it. Not all judicial sentences are of equal weight, or

equally rich in significance. It is something very different among us whether sentence is pronounced by a county judge or by the Supreme Court. A sentence passed by a world power like Germany has far higher significance than a sentence passed at Madura by an inland *Kadi*. And naturally a sentence would obtain highest significance only, when it was passed by a power which judicially had command of *the whole world*.

Therefore it is added: Augustus, the emperor, could bring it to pass that a decree was sent out, that *all the world* should be taxed.

His therefore was a power, not merely over one tribe, over one nation, and not even over one part of the world, like the power of Napoleon, but a power over *all the world*, be it only over the world as it was then known, which then counted, and which extended across Europe, Africa and Asia.

So what Augustus did, or what his governor did, was done in the name of *the whole world*, and it is not a Jewish prince, but the *Prince of the world*, who, in the name of all that world, by its governor has sentenced Jesus to death.

That Cyrenius, who is mentioned in verse 2, has nothing to do with it. Dull-brained book learning may break its teeth on him. What matters in vs. 2 is, that that prince of this world, that that emperor Augustus, had a governor over Palestine. Cyrenius was a precursor of Pontius Pilate.

Under that world-power and under that imperial power Jesus was born, and through his governor that emperor would consecrate Jesus unto death, not by an act of violence, but by virtue of sentence, i. e. as maintainer and executioner of appointed law (right).

And that law would be Roman law, that is to say, the richest, most beautifully developed law known

on earth; a right in its *starting point* and *principle* deeply sinful, but in its *guarantee of right* the boldest.

Waste no energy therefore on this "first taxing" and on that Cyrenius; the main point is, that when Immanuel comes, He, the Christ is born under *that* sovereign power, and under *that* administration of justice; that the "whole world" according to *the best interpretation of right* which it was able to produce of itself, has judged and sentenced Him; and that only thereby and in this way the judicial sentence on Gabbatha and the execution of that sentence on Golgotha, according to God's counsel, had power to cause Jesus' offering to be "an atonement not only for our sin, but for the sin of the whole world".

So here you see a *twofold work of God* running side by side, and yet wonderfully inworking one upon the other.

On one side the work of God *in Israel*, and on the other side the work of God *among the nations*.

Seemingly these two have nothing in common with each other.

When in Solomon's days God's work in Israel had already received its richest foreshadowing, in the seven-hill city of the Romans there was no stone yet put upon another. Even when for Israel the exile was approaching, Rome was still of scarcely any count. In Israel's prophecies you hear of Babylon and Tyre, of Nineveh and Moab, but Rome has scant mention.

So *sacred* history in Israel and *profane* history of Rome run on both sides in a bedding altogether their own, seemingly without connection and without coherence.

In Asia and Africa empire after empire collapse;

finally Rome has its rise. Even Greece comes to ruin. And the whiles Israel's glory pales, and the remnant of Jews seems a mere nothing, the sun of Roman superiority and glory rises ever higher above the horizon. At length Rome's power has broken the latest resistance. And now Rome's power embodies itself *in an emperor,* i. e. in one person, who as "divine", is worshiped as *divus.*

A real "Prince of the world" shines from that moment on at Rome in the imperial palace.

And yet by the side of it the quiet work of God in the sacred domain uninterruptedly went on. The Annas and Simeons look for their Messiah. In John has appeared "the voice of one crying". Mary, "blessed among women", has conceived. Angels of God have descended. Presently the Babe in Bethlehem is born. And while the Roman legion shake their halberds before the temple at Jerusalem, and horn and trumpet give the signal of the watch, the angels of God sing gloriously in the fields of Ephrata of peace on earth, and of good pleasure with man, not to the honor of Caesar Augustus, but to the glory of "God in the highest".

So "the work of God" in Israel approaches ever closer "the work of God among the nations".

First in the decree that went out from Caesar Augustus. Presently more perfectly when Pontius Pilate, his governor, surrenders Jesus to the death of the cross. Finally, with the triumph of Jesus, when the Roman world-empire falls into ruins, and Christ's church conquers Europe.

And that twofold work of God still goes on.

Even now there is on one side a *hidden* history of regeneration, of gathering, of faith development and work of love, in brief an history of the Sion of

God and of Christ's continuously repressed church.

And alongside of this, a history of the world, a history of wars and of commotions of peoples, at bottom nothing but one continuous opposition against the Christ of God.

Until some day both these streams shall prove to be aimed by a selfsame Divine purpose at one mark, to be directed to one end, when once more that same Christ shall come to the world, and once more the Prince of the world shall have caused his degree to go forth.

Yea, even in your own life and in the life of your children this is so.

With you too there is an *external* history of lot in life, of training, of associations, of worldly calling, of vicissitudes, and of enmity of men. But alongside of this that other work of God *within you,* the work of God of faith and love and hope, of regeneration and conversion, of contrition and sanctification, of bringing in, sealing and initiation.

And these two leadings of God work in upon each other, till once for you too these two shall converge, when the crown shall be handed you, not by an emperor like Augustus, but by your King and Lord.

VI

"TO GIVE LIGHT TO THEM THAT SIT IN DARKNESS AND IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH!"

N the entirely unique days of Bethlehem there were strong commotions in the world of spirits. This you observe with respect to the good angels, who appear in vast hosts, as never before, and no less with respect to demons or evil angels, who possessed person after person, and sometimes in great companies entered into a single human soul. Call to mind the terrible case of the man with the legion of devils.

So the missions of angels were forceful, emphatic and manifold. Think of the quiet family of priest Zacharias at Hebron and of the virginal Mary of Nazareth.

And what likewise indicates this mighty undulation, is the inspiring pressure to song, that went out from the Holy Ghost. For centuries together sacred psalmody had been silent. No song was evoked from the harp. But now that the Child Jesus comes, yea, before He comes, that sacred impulse to song also returns. Zacharias, Mary, presently Simeon, each receives from the Holy Spirit his song of praise and sings it out in notes of highest exultation, that God's church might sing it after them.

Messiah was about to come, and it must needs be, that now every false imagination be cut off.

In unholy hands the "Babe in the manger" might so easily become a plaything for emotional feeling and for the entertainment of a sentimental world.

And this could not be.

For this the appearance of our great God and Savior in the flesh was too strikingly serious and too divinely great.

And therefore before Jesus came, through Zacharias the priest the Holy Spirit proclaimed with such deep earnestness, that Immanuel should be "the dayspring from on high, to give light *to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.*" (Luke 1:79.)

Who are they, that sit in this darkness and shadow of death?

No one of us outside of Christ who does *not* sit in it.

Our artificial light does not affect this in the least, and the glow of the fireworks we ignite at times only makes that deep gaping background stand out the more terribly real in its darkness.

There rests upon our human life, upon our human heart, upon the eye of our human soul *nothing* but darkness. And though some gleam of a common grace penetrates through that darkness, it still remains dark, and the look that peers through that twilight still breaks upon ever deeper darkness.

And notice carefully, what is added to it of that "shadow of death", for this does not mean, that there is darkness and shadow of death, but, that this darkness springs from the fact, that death casts its terrible shadow upon our life, and covers our whole existence with that shadow.

Thus when Immanuel comes, His coming in that general sense is a salvation of our whole existence.

With Him comes the Light, and that Light breaks

through, and shines forth with His beams and is not held back by that darkness. And so He came to give light to them that sat in darkness and in the shadow of death.

But this word has a still deeper significance.

Darkness all about you *blinds at length even your eye.* Martyrs who in times past spent long years in a dark hole, could, when finally liberated from their chains, no more endure the light, and the stronger the light shone, the more convulsively they closed their eyes.

And such Jesus found us people, when He came to the manger of Bethlehem.

In darkness and *ourselves* inwardly darkened, and therefore seeking darkness as our element. Approximately like nightbirds, which blind by day stare into the light and see nothing, but in nightly darkness discover their prey.

Such a nightbird is the sinner by nature.

So long as it remains *night,* he sees *something,* but as soon as the light comes he *no longer sees anything.* Paul, the holy apostle, says it so strikingly: The selfsame Light is to one a savor of life, and a savor of death to the other.

And therefore it is not a mere *coming* of Jesus *to* people who sit in darkness and shadow of death, but an *appearing* to such wretched ones.

Jesus *appears* to a sinner, only when that sinner becomes *aware of the fact* that He is there and that he *sees* Him, and can not *bear* that look.

And so salvation limits itself; not because Jesus is not full and rich of grace (for no light *can* shine save as it shines upon all, so that the Light in Immanuel could not rise above the horizon, but was bound to cast its rays upon *all*) but because it had to give

light to *persons*, and all persons do not stand in the same attitude toward that Light.

Herod undergoes an entirely different operation of that Light from the Wise men of the East. The men with stave and sabre, who presently murder in Bethlehem, are altogether differently disposed towards it from the shepherds in Bethlehem.

Laud and praise with the one, hatred and evil passion with the other.

With Mary the Light entered most deeply into the soul, far more than with Joseph. She felt a sword go through her soul, and the mighty workings of an Omnipotent God had taken hold of her.

And, with every return of that manger of Bethlehem, it is so still.

With each returning Christmas that Dayspring from on high beams forth anew its glow of grace and life-bringing compassion, and will appear where He did not appear before, but always to such as sit in darkness and shadow of Death.

Therefore a poor person is always more happy with the manger than a rich person. A child is far more charmed by it than a great man. One who is sick is more refreshed by it than he who is well. For over all littleness and weakness and human need and misery there beams from that manger a friendly Light that comforts.

But yet, this is not the deepest working of Bethlehem's Light.

It truly counts, even as it delighted those shepherds and those wise men from the East, and this lower utterance of Christmas happiness and Christmas joy must not be cut off.

But, it is not the deepest working of that wondrous and beautiful Light.

This wondrous Light not merely intends to break through the clouds, to cast a friendly light on forests and on fields, but wants to penetrate to branch and stem, there as by magic to produce twig and bud, and from that bud presently to unfold a flower, and from that flower to let fragrance exhale, for the delight of Him Who created it.

And so it is in the world of the soul.

That Light of the Dayspring from on high must penetrate through the eye of your soul into the very center of your soul, and life-breathing and life-quickening in that innermost part of your soul, make what is barren green and fresh and on your stem cause a flower to unfold to the glory of God.

But for this very reason it is needful that you not merely sit in darkness, but that you *know* that you are in the shadow of Death.

The nightbird is not troubled by darkness because it is his element, and an unconverted sinner is not disturbed by the shadow of Death, because like the unwashed sow he knows no better than that wallowing in the mire belongs to his nature.

And so long as such is the case with you, Bethlehem is nothing to you. Then no beam of its Light breaks through in your heart. Then that Light can form no flower-bud in you nor cause it to unfold on your stem.

No, no, your darkness must *oppress* and *distress* you; being seated in the shadow of Death must make you *anxious* and *afraid*.

You must not be able *to endure* that darkness and terrible shadow *any longer*.

It must make you uneasy and concerned in your soul.

And then, when you cry by reason of your need,

and as a child that is afraid in the dark, *calls* and *cries* for light and to be taken out of that fearsome darkness; O, then when the Light comes, and through those darknesses sends out toward you His first light-beams, then your eye drinks in that first faint ray of light, even as one athirst in hell asks for a drop of water at a fingertip to cool his burning tongue.

Then that Little Child is become glorious to you.

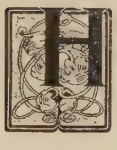
Then with you also it comes to laud and praise and love.

Jerusalem, you hear the joyful sounds!

O, might they be overheard by the angels of God from your soul!

VII

"SO GOD LOVED THE WORLD!"



AIL, happy day of Bethlehem's crib, that amidst the cold of nature, and of the cheerless frigidity that is abroad upon society at large, makes us aware again of a friendly, fostering ray of light of the love of our God.

Times are so different.

Not a half a century ago almost all Christian Europe, and by far the greater majority of our own people, were still strong in the unshaken conviction that there were no facts so real, no events so well certified, as the birth of the Babe at Bethlehem and the angel-glory, that has shone upon that crib.

With childlike simplicity in those days of our beautiful Christmas every one drank in the beneficent fragrance, that was wafted towards us from the holy circle of Mary and her Divine Child; and every soul revelled in the sweetness of the heavenly music, that once purled through Ephrata's fields.

Our children jubilated and our greybeards rejoiced with them. It was as though one overwhelming human joy had kindled every soul. From every side people flocked to our temples of prayer. In those houses of worship the voices of song swelled with glad fulness. And when those Christmas days had once more been enjoyed, strengthened and encouraged and as anointed with fresh oil, the somber seriousness of Old year's night was anticipated.

It was a sacred occasion to all that had been baptized; a glorious feast of Christendom in its

broadest dimensions; and to all who kept that feast the Babe of Bethlehem was and continued to be the all-animating center, the object of love on the part of their once more softened heart.

And now?

How has the gold been tarnished, and the honor been removed from Israel!

Almost the whole tone-giving class of our society has become deaf to the poetry of Bethlehem, and in the soul apostatized from our Savior and Lord. Almost everything that stands exalted in the land, exerts influence, and is celebrated, has come to the unblessed conviction, that Jesus is still the Rabbi of Nazareth, and among Israel's rabbis one of the most excellent, perhaps the most renowned; but for the rest a man as we, born from an earthly father, and no longer a holy Presence before Whom one kneels in worship, with a "My Lord and my God" on the lips.

Thus everything that is told of Bethlehem becomes pure imagination. Imagination that there were angels that descended; and invention that moving angel-song with its heavenly greetings of peace on this earth.

But Christmas is still kept.

So age-old an oak is not felled with one stroke.

But with this modern Christmas it is no longer the *Lion* from *Judah's* tribe, but the Christmas-tree that has become the all attracting center. So they come together to enjoy the lights that decorate that tree, and the presents, that are fastened to its branches; but of the great gift of God's impenetrable love there is almost nothing felt in the petrified heart.

Such a Christmas evening is then one of worldly enjoyment, as one honors the other with presents,

and remembers especially the little ones; and then a revelling in banquets; and finally the dance.

And Jesus is forgotten, and the crib no more remembered.

Even in the house of prayer *art* must gradually take the place of our blessed Gospel, and on the home-ward way, minds are full, not of the eternal love that God has shown us in that crib of Bethlehem, but of the glorious organ-play and the artistically rendered song. Also of the flowers that enhanced the beauty of the service.

So it largely goes on abroad; and so on ever larger scales it assumes this aspect in our land; even though with gratitude to God it can be acknowledged, that our more serious interpretation of life has not tolerated thus far so gross an encroachment upon decorum.

But although this tarnishing of the gold, and this progressive apostacy of Christendom, is a matter of deep grief to God's people, yet it should not surprise us.

An historic faith, if it goes no deeper, and does not become saving, can not maintain itself. There was in this general Christmas joy, for already more than a century, too a great lack of inner reality. Sentiment and feeling operated more than inner warmth of faith. And where that Babe was found so lovely, and that mother so interesting, and that angelic host so touching, one sensed almost nothing more of what it is, in Jesus to hail a *Savior of sinners.*

Christmas joy engaged indeed the heart, but not the conscience within that heart, and the prophecy of the angel: "He shall *save* His people from their sins," left the soul's perception cold.

That could not stand. There was bound to come

a break in it. And God the Lord, weary with that play with what is holy, has withdrawn even the afterglow of the light, and now these wanderers walk in their own darkness.

What is still worse, even in those circles which are still Christian, where our Savior is still confessed as God revealed in the flesh, many a preacher has deemed it his duty, in all sorts of ways to make it plain to the multitudes, that these Christmas narratives must not be understood in so literal a sense, as historic truth. That here there is more myth than history, or if no myth then at least saga, and that what St. Luke and St. Matthew report, is more of a representation formed at a later date, than report of what has happened. It is still poetry, but now no longer poetry of the Compassionate One, but charming poetry of man.

Thus there is terrible apostacy abroad among us; a forecast of *approaching* apostacy in circles, in which the fear of the Lord is still alive; and the old, childlike humble faith in what the Evangelists tell us of Bethlehem's crib, is only left in those narrower circles, where making light of the fixedness of the Word is never tolerated, and the question: "What must I do to be saved?" still burns in every one's conscience.

But for this very reason in those narrower circles Christmas joy has become so much the more serious.

Much more yet than ever a holding of oneself fast to the Word, knowing that he who once departs from this, must with that Word at last lose *everything*. Much more than formerly a serious looking forward to evil days, that await the church of Christ, since it seems that the very elect are being tempted away. But also much more than in earlier days a warm giving of thanks and praise at the remem-

brance and frequent meditation on the unspeakable gift, which in that crib of Bethlehem God the Lord has bestowed upon the world.

"So God loved the world, that He has sent His only Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The old, but ever new and eternal youthful Gospel for every child of man, that thirsts after salvation and atonement of his sins, and in that thirst does not lose the love of compassion for a world so deeply sunken and fallen away from God.

For the love of God for the world never addresses you so strongly, as when you see, how sinfully cold the world is, in its treatment of that love of God.

That was not so evident, when it seemed as though the whole people believed and thanked God for the gift of His Son. But since the mask of inner untruthfulness fell away, and the tone-giving class of society became estranged from that love for Jesus, and scarcely anything more is felt of what is given us in the Christ, that ice-cold unthankfulness, that coolness of heart, and offensive unemotionalism of the world comes out in such striking colors, that you almost despair of understanding, how God the Lord has given His own dear Son to *such* a world.

That it rose up in rebellion against God, so long as Christ *did not* appear; and that it rejected the prophecy of the Messiah Who was to come, as almost unbelievable; this you can enter into. The heathen knew of nothing and lay bound in the bands of death and of darkness.

But that a state of society such as ours, now that Christ *is* born, having honored Christ for many centuries, closes its eyes to His divine majesty, and after all the blessing which the Crib of Bethle-

hem has spread abroad among the nations, can still be so untouchable of heart, as, notwithstanding this highest exhibition of God's love, to cipher away the highest act of love on the part of our God, is so tragic an utterance of inner corruption, that you almost ask yourself, if the salt has thus become saltless, wherewith it *can* yet be salted.

What more can God yet have to do? He who after the Crib of Bethlehem does not believe in the love of God, by what higher exhibition of love can he become convinced?

Is there then yet more with God, that He can give us and thus far did not give? Can there be a still higher revelation of His divine compassion thinkable!

This *was* possible in the days of Noah and Moses and David, when the Christ had *not yet* come. Then at least more still *could* come, for God had not yet given the earth His Son. And when Christ came, that gift of His Son excelled everything and put into the shade, what thus far had been done for the salvation of our race.

But how can there anything more happen now? He who, when God gives His Son to the world, is not moved, *what* then can move him? God gives no less than *His Son.* That Son of His love is the brightness of His glory and the express image of His substance. That Son God generates in His own Being. In that Son of His good pleasure God Himself is. Through that Son He has created the world and poured out in that Son all His treasures of love, power and wisdom. And so nothing can be thought, neither in heaven nor on earth, that can surpass that Immanuel in richness and in worth of majesty.

With that gift of the Son the inexhaustible richness of God's compassion is *exhausted.*

There is no higher. There *remains* nothing more to give.

And God Who gave His only-begotten Son to the world has no more that He can give that world, above Him.

More and richer and fuller love the world, He *can not.* In that gift of His Son to the earth the love of God for that world is *consummated.*

"So God loved the world, that He gave it His Only-begotten Son."

And now God *can* go no further. And just that makes the sin of unbelief and apostacy, which now has overtaken the world, so dreadful. This threatens to become sin against the Holy Ghost; sin of hardening *against God's eternal love.*

God loves *the world.*

Of course not in its sinful strivings and unholy motions. As such is enemy of God whoever is called a friend of the world. But God loves the world for the sake of its origin; because God has thought it out; because God has created it; because God has *maintained* it and *maintains* it to this day.

Not we have made the world, and thus in our sin we have not maltreated an art product of our own. No, that world was the contrivance, the work and the creation *of the Lord our God.* It was and is His world, which belonged to Him, which He had created for His glory, and for which we with that world were by Him appointed. Not to us did it belong, but to Him. It was His. And *His* divine world we have spoiled and corrupted.

And herein roots the love of God, that He will repair and renew this world, His own creation, His own work of wisdom, His own work of art, which

we have upset and broken, and polish it again to new lustre.

And it *shall* come to this. God's plan does not miscarry, and with divine certainty He carries out the counsel of His thoughts. Once that world in a new earth and a new heaven shall stand before God in full glory.

But the children of men meanwhile can fall out of that world. If they will not cease to corrupt His world, God can declare them unworthy of having any longer part in that world, and as once He banished them *from Paradise,* so at the last judgment He will banish them *from the world,* banish them from this earth, and cast them out into the outermost darkness, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

And therefore whoever would be saved with that world, as God loves it, let him accept the Son, Whom God has given to that world, in order to save the world. Let him not continue standing afar off, let him not hesitate, but flee to God's cities of refuge; and those cities of refuge are Bethlehem and Golgotha, where God has revealed His impenetrable compassions.

Be there in this sense, be there in that spirit again among God's people a keeping of our wondrous Christmas feast.

No rejoicings of oneself in outward jubilation; no pleasing of oneself with what stimulates the nerves and soothes the feeling; but a penetration to that unfathomable love of God, to drink in again afresh that love, and, intoxicated with that love, to thank God for His unspeakable gift.

Also with your children you must not *play* at Christmas. They too have been baptized, they too

are called to repentance, they too should have fellowship not merely with the Crib and the shepherds and the angelic hosts, but fellowship, soul's-fellowship of faith and love, with the Only-begotten Son of God.

Preaching of the love of God in Bethlehem's crib should not pass over the heads. It must warm the heart, move the soul, awaken the conscience, and fill us with something of that holy love for the world, whereby God was moved, to give to that world His Son.

God so loved not merely *Israel,* but the *world.* Israel was but a middle link, inserted in the life of the nations, to bring about, that from David's tribe the Messiah could be born. Israel is the blade, but He is the rich full ear, which by God is offered to the world as the Bread of life.

And therefore the Lord can not return upon the clouds, until first His Gospel is preached to all nations and peoples. Otherwise God's love would not extend itself to the *whole world;* for in that world every people has its significance, and every nation must be a pearlshell, from which early or late a pearl is added to the crown of Jesus' glory.

The Lord doeth wondrous things. Even now He stretches out again the hand of His compassions over Africa. A whole continent, that lay swathed in pitchdark night for perhaps four thousand years, and of which even Christendom thought at times, that it lay excluded outside of the circle of God's compassions. And now the light dawns also upon that continent. And thus no single part of the world lies outside of the reflection of His eternal love.

And therefore each Christmas must be to us again a call, to co-labor in that great work of God *in all the world,* that the Cross of Christ may be carried from pole to pole, and the song from the fields of Ephrata

make a psalm of peace to be heard in the ear of *all* peoples in *all* the earth.

Provided for the sake of those many peoples outside, you do not forget your own land and people.

Here especially God has done wondrous deeds. In a very particular way our Country has been called to be a witness for the Son of God. And therefore your Christmas accuses you, when, cold-hearted and self-sufficient, you do not concern yourself about your own people and land, and when it does not interest you, whether that Babe of Bethlehem shall bless that broad multitude of your own people, that does not know the law, and still less the Gospel, and whether He shall pour down the beams upon it of His glorious light.

But above all look to your own flesh and blood, to your sons and daughters; not merely to the younger, but especially to the older. They hear so many voices from that world, that lead them away from God. Temptations are so manifold. And what becomes of your young men and maidens, when they close their ears to the angel-voices that once sounded in Ephrata's fields the message of God's peace to the world and in that world to them. Halfway measures do not avail. They must be altogether won. They must be converted to the Lord their God, to love Him for His unspeakable love with *all* their heart and *all* their soul and *all* their senses. Definite choice alone saves.

He who is not *for* Jesus, becomes more and more *against*.

And then look to yourself.

You too must keep Christmas. Not alone for others, but also for yourself. At Christmas angel-fingers must also traverse the strings of your soul. The heavenly music of God's love in the gift of His

Son must also entice an echo from your breast. And you too must find in your own unworthiness the standard, by which to measure the unfathomable depth of Divine love, that gave for you His Only-begotten Son, and moved *toward you,* to save you from destruction.

The loveliness of Bethlehem you only understand, when over against it you put the awful detestableness of hell. For hell tells you, what it is, towards which Satan entices you; what the place is, which he has prepared for you; and what the unblessed company is of the lost, towards which he is forever calling you.

And over against this God puts His Bethlehem. That is the spot towards which He calls you. In those angels He shows you, into what blessed glorious companies He wants to bring you. And that Babe of Bethlehem He places over against the Tempter who entices you.

And when at Christmas Satan continues his call: *"Bow your knee unto me and you shall be as God!"* and those angels continue their song of God's good pleasure in men and of glory to God in the highest, and of peace on earth—let then your own soul know to what voice it lends a hearing. If in your soul there is jubilation in Christ, do not boast of your own piety, but give God, and God alone the glory, yea, thank your Father Who is in heaven, that you also are deemed worthy, to follow the Lamb, whithersoever He goeth, and to hail that Immanuel as your Redeemer, to Whom once every knee shall bow, and Whom once every tongue shall confess, that He is Christ the Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

VIII

"NO ROOM IN THE INN."

HE FOXES have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head (Matt. 8: 20). So it was in the years, when Jesus went from city to town. And so it was, when He came to earth: "No room for Him in the inn!"

It was no enmity against Jesus, that at Bethlehem, in what we would call the hotel, there was no room at the disposal of Mary and Joseph. St. Luke clearly tells, that it was because of overcrowding.

The enrollment according to tribes and families had suddenly brought an unusually large number of people to Bethlehem; for especially those families, which in one way or another, belonged originally to the royal city of David, were proud of their descent, and on no account would be absent at this time.

Hence a great number of travellers had come simultaneously to the little town; and, as is readily understood, the hotel or inn was not prepared for this.

Ordinarily it would have been much, had there been two dozens of sleeping-chambers ready at one time; and now at once the house was full of people.

Of course, he who came first, was first served. So the last room was soon taken. And when, late at night, Mary and Joseph arrived in the little town, with the best of wills the host was not able to accommodate them; and all he could offer them was a resting-place in hay in the stable. He had no more room to let. The stable was the best he could offer!

Least of all was there enmity in this against Jesus; for who knew Mary? And more still, who knew the holy child Jesus that, still unborn, she carried under her heart?

That the Savior of the world was born in stable, and has slumbered his first night of life in a manger, is therefore no index of human hard-heartedness, but *a Divine disposition.*

The Lord has willed it so.

There is here a Divine symbolism, in which the mystery of the Incarnation lies as it were enswathed.

Immanuel could have been born amidst high surroundings as the world counts them. He could have been born at Jerusalem. In the royal palace. From a royal princess. Born in a magnificent apartment. And thus have been surrounded from His first night of life with all the splendor and wealth of the world.

But this the Lord has *not* willed.

By His counsel it was not Jerusalem, but the forgotten Bethlehem that was appointed. Not a royal princess chosen to be His mother, but an obscure maiden in all her lowliness. And so it is by God's counsel, and by that counsel alone, that here not merely all splendor and wealth remained afar off, but that even the most needed accommodations were lacking. *That stable at the inn* is intended on the part of God for the birth of Immanuel.

And so it is here the Lord, Who is about to do something great in the earth, yea, *the* greatest that ever took place on earth, but Who on this very account rejects and excludes whatever is deemed great or high or honorable among men, and is pleased to choose what is lowly, humble and despised as starting point.

Thus only is all human greatness cast down, and thus only it was pure *Divine greatness* that shone in what is despised of men.

Herein is all the glory of the mystery of the Incarnation.

The Incarnation is *condescending love*, the *down-bending* compassion of the Lord God!

It is not merely an entering into this world; and not merely an appearing among the children of men; no, it is an entering into our fallen and humiliated human nature.

There is in this mystery a seeking of what was lost, and therefore a going down into the depth, where lay that which was lost. Yea, so deep the lost could not lie, but Immanuel went down deeper into this fallenness, to embrace from underneath what was most deeply lost.

To what still maintained itself or seemed to hold itself up; to what still bent itself upward or seemed to bend up; to what still raised up something or held high, Immanuel could not join Himself. On the contrary, all that had first to be pulled down, before it could be saved. And to what was irretrievably lost, stretched out the arms of eternal compassion.

What does the outcome show?

This, indeed, that the birth of Immanuel would not have been half so touching and striking, if there had been room for Him in that inn.

Suppose, that Mary and Joseph had arrived half a day sooner and had found a commodious room, how much striking poetry would have been lost, and how much less would the birth of that Babe have appealed to you. How much that is moving and divinely beautiful we would have missed.

You must have your Savior in that crying antithesis, otherwise He is not your Savior.

Nothing of earth, nothing of the world, even no chamber and no cradle.

Only in this thoroughgoing antithesis Immanuel shines out before you in His heavenly glory and in His Divine greatness.

From that manger that Holy Babe appeals to you altogether differently, than from a richly-upholstered cradle; from that stable far more touchingly and strikingly than if He had been born in a hall of princes.

Just because there is nothing there of the world, it is heaven alone.

Your eye is not diverted.

There is nothing there save Immanuel, and in Immanuel the impenetrable mercy of your God.

And it is not otherwise with the people of the Lord, with the flock which the Shepherd leads.

With her, too, and *for* her it has pleased God to appoint the selfsame crying contrast.

In churches of wood, as an old rhyme has it, preachers were of gold! And it has been the experience of Jesus' church, that she fared better in a stable than in a temple, which had much in common with princely palaces.

The inn, too, is a symbol. Symbol of the communal life of the world. In a hotel sleep all sorts of travellers, who otherwise do not belong together, under one roof.

And in that communal life of the world, the church of Christ does not belong. There is not her place. There she does not find quietness for her divine rest.

Hence, the church of Christ never sank away more deeply, than when from the stable she went back to the inn and sought to become national or state-church; and neither did she revive again in spiritual vigor,

except when the Lord drove her out of the inn again and pointed her back to the stable.

Or without metaphor, if you like.

As often as the church sought her strength in money and property, in great learning, and in what gives fame and honor among men, and thus would be looked up to by the world, she became inwardly emaciated and impoverished.

Until with the Lord there were thoughts of compassion again, and He put enmity between her and that world, and she had to be content again in lowlier positions.

And then this Mary, too, went back again to the stable.

But in that stable this Mary, too, was able again to press the holy child Jesus to her heart.

And without metaphor here also if you will, to the church of Christ in that lowlier position, fellowship with her glorious Head was restored.

Mostly in the stable of lowliness are they born, the spiritual children of our God.

IX

"PEACE ON EARTH"

ETWEEN this and last Christmas lies what the world has called her Peace-court, her Peace conference. A great gathering, but whose peace banner had scarcely been rolled up, when war began at the Cape. So the human heart forms illusions for itself, so it is time and again bitterly disappointed, and yet with ineradicable homesickness, even after most bitter disappointments, it keeps on crying for peace.

Undoubtedly, conflict exalts, struggle steels, it must even be confessed, that all exaltation of nations almost invariably has sprung from bitter strife. Would not the Dutch national greatness have been unthinkable without the bloody struggle with the insolence of Spain? But do not forget, this only holds good for our real, our *actual* conditions.

Now that sin holds sway, now that sin poisons every relation of life, now that from sin arises every time again ambition and tyranny, and in sinful passion one nation wills to consume the other, struggle of life and death for him who would remain free, or would become free, is unavoidable.

But in its holiest ideal our human heart does not reckon after that standard of reality, not after the measuring line of these facts.

Our heart does not evoke its ideals from this blood drenched earth, but entices it from its inner life, from its holier internal address, from creation's inspiration from above. Even when in its wanderings the heart lost its God, it still adorns itself with

no other diamond than that which in the hour of creation it received in its human diadem from its God.

Thirst after peace, homesickness after peace, passion for peace, is, above and beyond the life of earth, a reaching back to the better fatherland, a pining for the heavenly, a panting with ardent desire for what prevails around God's throne, and not here upon earth.

Do not make light of this, laugh not at this.

For though self-delusion may go ever so far on the part of a world, that keeps on fostering sin, and will no more hear of God, and which yet continues to cry for peace, it is still the orginal nobility of our race, that shows itself in that cry.

It betrays our heavenly origin, it pleads for a nobler descent than man himself will confess.

It is human symphony with what in Ephrata God's angels sang of: *Peace on earth.*

Only the peoples and the princes of the peoples should not make themselves believe, that *they* can appoint peace on earth. Statesmen and diplomats should not assume the attitude, as though their ingenuity could ever restore peace on earth.

This the outcome shows once more.

Weeks and months the wise men of the nations and the counsellors of princes were gathered in our royal residence. In wise prudence and in cunning craftiness they were excelled by none. But while they multiplied words about peace, they pondered on what best way they could checkmate one the other. And if ever mountains had to bring forth, that a mouse might be born, it was here.

They had so little thought of disarming, that during the peace conference itself they pondered upon reinforcement of their might. They accepted

arbitration, only not for those differences from which murderous wars used to arise. And before their work was ended, war was again abroad.

That peoples and princes do not bring us this glory, but that the Bishop of Rome could have guaranteed that peace to us, is, with the book of history open before us, an assertion no less absurd.

Yea, more still, even what others have said, that not the Pope, but Jesus Christ brings peace, is rather loudly contradicted by Scripture and history.

"I came not to bring peace, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34), remains in the face of all such unhealthy idealism the utterance that nothing can put aside.

No, peace between the peoples, that glory of the nations, comes not before Jesus returns. Then the lamb shall lie down with the leopard. Not before. Until then remains the word: "I will put enmity". And until then the judgment shall stand, that the sin of the world avenges itself in the shedding of human blood.

Not of peace on earth *among the nations*, but of peace on earth *in the human heart* have the angels of God sung in chorus, of peace with heaven above, of peace with God.

In the world around us, in life outside of us, in the commotion of the nations, the question, that is here at stake, is not to be settled.

In the branches it shall continue to storm, the peace, which Bethlehem brought, is only known in the root.

Sin was no contention of Adam with Eve, but a contention of both with their God. Truly, strife between man and man followed from this. Not long, before Cain sheds Abel's blood. But it had not its rise between men. It did not begin with a fight of

man against man. Peace on earth is broken by revolt against heaven, by taking up of strife against the Almighty.

That was, that is sin. And in this strife taken up against God, lay the source, therein lies the root of all enmity, of all strife, of all commotion between individuals first, and then among peoples and nations.

No war ever broke out, but sprang from covetousness, from ambition, from injured feelings of pride, from despotism and lust to override. It was always sin in the heart of princes, sin in the heart of statesmen, sin in people's public opinion, which caused wars to break out. He who was small would be great, he who was great would become greater. So there was no regard for right, nor was the given word honored. And in recklessness and from the passion of revenge the sword was grasped, and literally more than the wild animal they thirsted for battle.

Then little drops of sin in individual families, flowed together and formed a broad stream of national sin, and that national sin flamed up in wild war.

And therefore so long as the sin of the individual *person* strengthens itself, and in the *families* becomes habitual sin, and those habitual sins of the families accumulate and become *national* guilt, the torch of war shall every time again be carried abroad among the nations. And only, when Jesus returns, and all sin shall be brought to nought, in that destruction of sin shall the last strife be strangled.

And yet it remains fact, what in Ephrata's fields was proclaimed: with Bethlehem "*peace on earth*" is come.

In the Cross of Golgotha Jesus is become "our peace".

"We therefore being justified by faith, have peace with God!" (Rom. 5:1.)

Every word that you take from the Gospel with respect to this shows that here an altogether different peace is mentioned, a peace *not* among the nations, a peace *not* among the rulers of this earth, but a peace in the hiddenness of the human heart, a peace with heaven above, a peace with God.

Here it goes back to the root. Back to that kernel of life in our heart, from whence sin sprang, and in which alone sin can be destroyed. Back to the secret relationships which determine the right between our heart and our God.

Thus was the strife begun, begun with the struggle against the right of our God, and therefore reconciliation with God had first to be achieved, before mention could be made of peace for our human heart.

And now, it is true, the world has no knowledge of this, the world has no eye for it, that she has no peace within does not concern her, after peace with God she does not thirst. On the contrary, in arrogance, in her rebellion against God, in her violation of His right, she continues her revolt.

What she deems desirable is war's peace among the nations.

But such are not those that are known of the Lord.

Though the heart weeps at the inhuman cruelty of war among the nations, they know something yet more dreadful, something that inwardly troubles their soul, namely: the gnawing unrest of conscience, the absence of peace with the Holy One, the inner conflict of their heart with the right of their God.

And that fire, the fire of the inner conflict, is extinguished by Bethlehem, upon it is sprinkled the blood of the holy Lamb of God.

So theirs is become a peace, which surpasses all the peace of the world. Peace through the blood of the Cross. Blessed reconciliation in the Only-Begotten One. Permission again to cry out from the regenerated childheart the *Abba, dear Father!*

They have found peace again, peace with their God.

Only such is not the case with all, who at Christmas join in the angel song of *peace on earth.*

All too many are like the pipes of the organ, which emit tones, but without inner perception.

And here is the shadow-side of our church life.

To sing along without knowledge of the matter. To join in jubilation without understanding of the secret of salvation. To say with others that in Jesus it has become *peace on earth,* but with the old unpeace for God in the heart.

And this every Christmas-tide, as it comes again, must modify. Every time again in the Church of God, members must arise who, from singing at Christmas-tide outwardly along with others, pass over to the inward knowledge and understanding of that peace.

Do not forget, that either from the Church influence goes out upon the world, or the world with its influence takes possession of the Church. So, standing in the midst of the world, the Church must ever strike a deeper key-note, or involuntarily the Church is enticed by the world to externalize the holy and the best that has been entrusted to us.

"Peace on earth!" The world will sing it with all sorts of variations. And if your life is not deepened,

in the end you will sing it after her in repulsive superficiality.

And therefore, you, Church of Christ, you suffer loss, when peace through the blood of the Cross is not enjoyed every time again by greater numbers in your midst in the inner chamber of the soul.

Keep in mind, that *Peace on earth* was sung to you by angels, and the angels of God could not take it superficially. The world of God's angels never has any concern other than *with the hiddenness of your heart.*

II.
EASTER

I

"DESTROY HIM THAT HAD THE POWER OF DEATH."

ROM days of old, long before Jesus arose, there was more than one, who had first died, and then returned from death unto life. Call to mind what happened in the house of the widow at Zarephath (1 Kings 17), when Elijah gave her back her child alive, and of what took place in the prophet chamber of Elisha, at the house of the Shunammite (2 Kings 4).

Think of Jairus, who received his daughter, of the widow of Nain, who received her son, of Mary and Martha who received their brother back from the dead, thanks to the word of power by the Savior Himself.

Even when Jesus died on Golgotha, graves at Jerusalem were opened, and departed saints returned unto life, and appeared to many.

All these however were no resurrections in that rich full sense, in which Jesus rose from the dead.

For all these it was a brief, a temporary return to this *earthly* life, presently to pay again the toll to death, and for a second time to be brought to that same deathbed, and to be carried out to that same grave, where once already their dead body had been laid to rest.

It was not so with Jesus.

He did not come back to this *earthly* life, but through the gate of this earthly life He entered upon the life of glory, and now dies nevermore, for after His resurrection death has no more power over Him.

In His death and resurrection Christ has conquered *death itself;* destroyed "him, who had the *power of death*"*;* for ever broken the bands of death.

Not Lazarus, Jesus is "the first fruit from the dead". No one arose before him. All those who besides Him shall taste eternal life, come *after* Him.

"Christ the first fruits. *Afterward* they that are Christ's. Everyone in *his own order.*"

The resurrections of Lazarus and the others truly had a rich, figurative significance, and there was connection between their temporary return to life and Jesus' resurrection; but merely a connection of symbolic prophecy in facts and no connection in the least of *equality.*

This comes out in what Jesus said, when He went to raise Lazarus, and in all John eleven you become confused every time, when you do not observe this accurate connection.

Certainly Lazarus came forth, to die again, and yet Jesus weaves into His address the highly spiritual word: "I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth in me, shall live, even though he were dead." A word that surely did not refer to Lazarus, for then Mary also, and Martha, who believed in Jesus, should have had to return, after their death, to this earthly life. And yet it did stand related to Lazarus' death, but in relation as figurative indication, as prophecy in the fact, as exhibition in limited measure of that selfsame *power,* which presently would shine forth altogether differently, first when Jesus Himself arose, and once in the quickening to glory of all His people.

That *power* is what here counts.

In Jesus' resurrection a conflict between two

universal powers, if we may so express ourselves, is settled.

In His rising Jesus brings to nought, *him who had the power of death.*

And in and behind that power of Christ worked the power of God Triune.

So witnesses to us the source of God's holy revelation: There was here *"the exceeding greatness of his power, according to the working of his mighty power,* which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead" (Eph. 1:19, 20).

This was *not* so when Lazarus came to life for a while, but this was so when Jesus rose from the dead. And therefore you read nothing further of Lazarus, but according to the word of the apostle, the whole wheel of salvation turns itself around Jesus' resurrection, as around its axle, both now and for ever.

From that resurrection is *your faith* (Eph. 1:19), from that resurrection *your sanctification* (Rom. 4:25), from that resurrection *your coming unto life* (Eph. 2:1), from that resurrection *your salvation* (1 Peter 3:21), from that resurrection of Christ *the glory that awaits you* (1 Cor. 15).

Without that resurrection of Christ all prophecy and exhibition of salvation is vain.

Only by that resurrection is the seal put upon all parts of salvation, everything goes on from promise into fulfilment, from example and figure into reality.

And all this because only in Christ's resurrection does your God show Himself to be truly God, God the Almighty, the Creator, and consequently Recreator of heaven and earth.

And this too is no strange matter to God's children, no miracle light on the horizon, which they look at from afar and wonder at, and which goes on outside themselves, for they carry about the effect

of that selfsame all exceeding almightiness of God already here on earth in their own heart.

For that in the heart of a sinful man *faith* is alive, is not alone a grace, but a miracle that so far exceeds all things else, that the holy apostle literally declares: The power of God, which increated faith in you, *is the same, equally great, all else excelling power of God's almightiness*, which He wrought in the rising of Jesus from the grave (See Eph. 1:19 and 20).

How is this possible?

Only by this, that both in your *faith*, and in Jesus' resurrection, a power showed itself which for ever and always governs the condition of the whole earth, of all stars and all suns, in brief: a power that rules the condition of *the entire universe.*

Why God created the world, He Who is all-sufficient unto Himself, who shall reveal it unto us?

Man knows it not, God knows it.

But now that He has created that world, God loves that whole world, all His makings, *His* work, *His* invention and creation of *His* hands.

And that He created a *world*, does not mean merely, that He created an endless host of all sorts of matter and forces, for this by itself was yet nothing more than the chaos of all the elements. But far more and far higher, it means that God put all matter and force in order, combined them, put them together into one mighty organic connection, and that in this one great organism the higher governs the lower, that in the highest creature, i. e. in man, it will let itself be governed of God, that so this God should be *King of glory* in all His creation.

So God bore rule in *the soul* of man, the soul of man bore rule over *his body*, through his body man

ruled not only the animal but also every realm of nature, and it was from man and through man, as the mouth of the whole creation, that praise and glory and worship were offered unto God.

All this hung together as one inseverable whole. A Divine masterpiece and exhibition of the Lord's manifold wisdom.

And as man through his soul governed his body, and through that body the world, so in all men ruled the head of humanity, and therefore, when that head of humanity, i. e. when Adam fell, everything fell.

With the praise which Adam first brought unto God the whole creation thrilled as with one thrill of joy, but when Adam fell, from his human heart corruption communicated itself as in a straight line to all the ends of the circumference of the creation, and that corruption was *death.*

And for this reason that violence of death could not be resisted, cast down, disjointed and destroyed in any other way, than along the selfsame way, by which death had once stolen into the Creation.

Now again there had to be a *head* of humanity; that head of humanity must needs avert death from his *soul*, and thus let his soul rule his *body*; to the end, that, having destroyed the germ and the root of death in his own body, even to create thereby the starting point, at which from humanity first, and by that humanity presently from the whole world, death could be repulsed.

So you understand, how the fact, that power entered into the soul of Jesus, as Head of humanity, actually to destroy death in His own body, and, free from death, for ever to rise, has become the great mighty turningpoint in the lot of the whole universe. For now the igniting spark of life goes out from Him upon all that are His, from that regenerated human-

ity upon the whole world, from the whole world upon the whole creation, and thus Satan's attempt to frustrate what by Himself God had intended with respect to His creation, is once and forever thwarted.

Therefore says the holy apostle, that Christ, by His death, has brought to nought him who had the power of death, *namely the devil* (Heb. 2:14).

On the other hand that same apostle writes to the church of Ephesus, that God, when by the all else surpassing power of His almightiness He made Christ to triumph in His body over the poison of death, has subjected *"all things"*, i. e. the whole universe under His feet, "all principality, all power, all dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come"; and that now Christ exercises that working, reaching and all things penetrating power "by His church", i. e. by His regenerated humanity, because she is His body, and the fulfilment, or if you like the everything-reaching-organ, of Him, "that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:20-22).

A most glorious anthem of praise, which is sung from the theme of Jesus' resurrection; but which is neither understood nor grasped, except you hold fast this golden chain: The Head of humanity is ruled by God; humanity by her Head; in that humanity the soul governs the body; in that humanity through the body it bears rule *over the whole universe.*

Christ is subjected to God; *all* things are subjected to Christ; and all things are subjected to Christ through the tie of His church.

How does the lightspark of the life regained, and by the resurrection rendered indestructible, extend itself along this golden chain?

This you will understand, when you go back to the first beginning of Genesis one.

There was chaos, but that chaos was not as yet the world. It proceeded from the creation, but that creation was only finished, when God had set in order everything that chaos contained, had combined and bound it into one mighty whole (See Gen. 2:1).

And against this death reacts.

Creation is *binding together,* death is dissolution.

By creation you advance from chaos to a world as God's work of art; by death you turn from that creation back to chaos. Death goes in against creation, brings creation to nought, is the direct opposite of creation.

See it in a corpse.

First there was the body, one animated, living, vigorous whole, with all sorts of matter and chemical forces in that body, but altogether governed by the life of the soul operating in that body.

So long therefore as the soul dwells in the body, and governs it, it remains one whole, and all these hidden powers and matter are articulated, bound together as one body, and are maintained by the soul as one organism.

No sooner however has death entered in, and separated the soul, than the body becomes a *corpse,* and if you give that corpse but time, you see *dissolution* come. When death has entered in all these different kinds of matter and their powers have lost their master. Now they all go their own way. The one is loosed from the other. *Dissolution* progresses on and on. In the end nothing remains but a chaos, disintegrated particles of matter, forces wrenching themselves more and more free. The body is no more; and even the corpse vanishes.

In altogether the same way death operates everywhere and in every creature. It does nothing except make loose, separate, dissolve what God in His

creation has put together and united. It must all be put apart. The entire beautiful building, that the chief Artist and Master builder had raised, must be broken down, story by story, beam by beam, stone by stone, till finally the foundations are wrenched apart. And when once everything, that God had bound together, would thus have been pulled down, demolished and torn asunder, creation would have been brought to nought, chaos would have returned, and Satan would have triumphed over God.

God as the Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth would have been conquered.

Death would have destroyed life.

Over against this our Almighty God has clearly shown, that He can put to nought not only that *dissolution* of His creation worked by death, through *binding it together* again, but much more yet, that He can so bind His disjointed creation together again, that from now on the all disjointing hand of death can never more shake or touch it.

This is the *re-creation.*

For in this re-creation there are three parts. First that God *maintains* the world, even while it is still under the curse of death. Secondly, that in the end He *repels* and *banishes* death from it. And thirdly, that once He will forever exclude death from it, so that, perfected in glory, it shall stand eternally.

But with this re-creation also it goes on after *the order appointed of God.*

The heart of the world was humanity, and the kernel-point in that humanity was the heart of her Head.

To this appointed order Satan was bound. Hence he could not attack God's creation in any other way, except by making Adam in his heart break with God.

Only thereby could he loosen the tie between the heart of Adam and his body. So likewise the tie between Adam's body and the earth from whence he was taken. And so finally the tie between this earth and the universe.

But if in his work of destruction Satan was bound to this order appointed of God, God Himself also remained bound to it in His re-creation. Re-creation is the renewal of creation after the order of the first creation.

Thus the plan was ready.

Shattered humanity must be brought together again under a new Head, in Whose heart the tie with God lay indestructibly fixed. That is the *Incarnation of the Word.*

From that new Head of humanity, from that second Adam, Satan had to break loose the body, till God had the soul and he the body. That is *Golgotha.*

And then God Almighty had to inwork in that soul of Jesus the all exceeding power, to take back that body, and now so to unite the body with itself, that Satan now nor ever, would be able to loosen a single fiber of it again. That was the *Resurrection.*

In the manger of Bethlehem soul and body in Jesus *separable.* On Golgotha soul and body of Jesus *separated* from one another. By the Resurrection soul and body of Jesus so united again, that they can never more be put asunder.

Thus in the glorified body of Jesus there has a point been given in the creation, against which the violence of Satan's destruction avails nothing. At that one point restoration, re-creation, glorification is finished. And now all further re-creation follows, in that God links fast all the elect to that risen

Savior, with that risen Savior makes them one organism, or as St. Paul says, one planting, making one body of it, and in that one Body of Christ incorporates everything, that has been ordained unto life.

So long as this one point was still lacking, nothing could become of the creation. But now that in the re-united "soul and body" of Christ that one fixed point is given, now the restoration of all things goes out from this with equal fixedness, as the ruin of all things followed of necessity from the breach in Adam's heart with his God.

In the risen Savior soul and body are re-united, never more to be separated again. Presently our mortal bodies are made like unto His glorious body. Around and for us a new earth under a new heaven. And that new earth, even as that new heaven full of the glory of God.

So from the side of *visible* things, and together with it, there operates in the hidden world of unseen things, the power of God to give birth to His elect again, and in that re-birth to plant *faith* in them.

And these two, that Jesus is risen, and that the elect receive *faith* in the soul, hang together.

Even as our Catechism says.

Christ by His resurrection has first *overcome death.* It is in connection with this that by regeneration *we rise to a new life.* And the end is, that from His resurrection flows once also our *resurrection* in glory.

So everything is linked together, so everything is organically articulated, so everything finds its root, its origin, its startingpoint, in Jesus' resurrection.

And if finally you ask, why this starting-point, this first motive, is set in the visible, in the material, in the flesh of Christ, in the body of the Holy, the

answer is, that the regaining of the lost creation could not begin otherwise, than at that point in the circumference, where it lay *farthest distant from God.*

This was not in the *personal* existence of man, for that had been created after God's image, and thus lay *nearest* to God.

Neither was it in the soul of man, for that soul is spiritual and is *allied* to God.

But it was in the *body* of man, taken from the earth, *from its dust,* from that, which, so far as contrast here prevails, stands directly over against the *spirit*; and that sensual, that which lies farthest distant, Jesus had taken up in His body.

As the holy apostle states it with so great emphasis in the epistle to the Hebrews (2:14).

Just because Christ by death, i. e. through the sunderance of soul and body, might destroy him that had the power of death, He must needs become partaker of the *flesh* and *blood* of children; even as we all are born as children in *flesh* and *blood.*

And therefore the mighty event which we celebrate at Easter, points Christendom back to the original creation, and forward to the eternal glory, and assures us that it is the resurrection of Christ from the dead, that unites the Paradise that was *lost* with the Paradise, that once surely *comes again,* in the reality of things itself.

Recently *Sascha Schneider,* a Russian of German descent, a painter of as rare artistic genius as inspiring faith, has produced on canvas *Satan standing by the dead body of Jesus.* A masterpiece of conception, arisen in a soul that had grasped the pseudo-triumph of the tempter. Satan is of superhuman form, in the robe of Babylon's princes, with a strikingly intel-

ligent head, and on the face the expression of inward rejoicing, and at the sight of the corpse, *triumphant pride;* but yet *with anxiety* in look and face. There speaks such majesty from that corpse. Satan does *not trust that corpse.* And in that very mistrust of the corpse Schneider shows himself to have grasped the significance of Easter.

II

"RISEN INDEED."

NCE our life was so rich. It was in those years of yore, when, at the dawn of another Easter, with a note of exultation the words: "Christ is risen!" was still heard from every one's lips, and the "*We shall live with Him* still resounded from every side as the sure prophecy of an eternal future.

Then every one still felt the contrast between *life* and *Death,* and shrank back as seriously from death, as Life attracted him. Therefore the idea of "Resurrection" was then so tempting. A coming again to life, even though we could not escape dying. And because the triumph of Life over Death had not merely been pictured nor imagined in Immanuel, Who arose, but was *realized,* therefore Easter addressed our human heart so sweetly, and even quickened joy and gladness in those broader circles, to which "the root of the matter" remained altogether hidden.

The deep, spiritual significance of Christ's Resurrection was then, even as now, understood and enjoyed by only a few. What the holy apostle gloried in, that the Christ "was delivered for our offences, and was *raised again for our justification* (Rom. 4:25), was for the most part not understood even by those who yet were assured of their personal "justification by faith". How, according to Peter's word, holy Baptism was connected with Jesus' resurrection, was seen even by less. And in the narrower circle of believers, which in all ages was

never very large, one clung mostly to the confession, that God could not permit His Holy One to see corruption; that because of His holy work, Immanuel could "not be held of death", and that the fruit of His Resurrection came to the good not of Himself alone, but also of His redeemed; now, in their spiritual resurrection, and once in the Resurrection of the flesh.

Without inaccuracy, it can be said, that in those better times a very small circle *understood* "the root of the matter"; that in a larger circle of believers the spiritual significance and fruit of Jesus' Resurrection was *enjoyed;* and that in the very broad circle of nominal confessors, which in the world sounded the upper note, the joy was shared, that the final triumph would not be the spoils of Death, but that once Life would triumph over Death, and in Jesus' death had so already triumphed.

Christ's church stood then actually as a city on a hill, from whose top the joy-fires shed forth their glow over the entire surroundings, and the world, which spiritually still stood outside of Jesus, participated in the joy.

Now however this is no more so.

Not because in the heart of Christ's church "the root of the matter" is no more understood, nor yet because the broader circle of believers has no more eye for the spiritual significance of Jesus' resurrection, but because Christ's church has lost her influence upon the world.

From of old the church of Christ gave the note, and as she gave the same, so the anthem of praise was begun, and in it even those outside took part.

Since then the world has withdrawn itself from the guardianship of the church of Christ. It has put

its own wisdom again in the place of the wisdom from God's Word. That Word it has rejected, to impart to the philosophers of our age in its stead a word of its own invention. Its life no longer drifts upon the sacred stream of the past, but upon the stream of its own unholy inspiration.

For this reason such altogether different ideas about Life and Death dominate the great masses.

Sense for, thirst after Life gradually decreased, and the fear and dread of Death lost its sting.

Our age, and that is the seal, that it has put upon itself, has *reconciled* itself with Death, and is become *indifferent* to Life.

He too who believes nothing, and dies without the faintest suggestion of hope, dies nevertheless calmly and submissively. The bier becomes invisible beneath the wreaths of flowers, by its beautiful drives and magnificent monuments the grave-yard becomes a park. Already before one has reached the half of his days, he is satiated with life. And the already long list lengthens itself, of those who found death sweet in the stream, or irresistible by the bullet.

Now go forth into that world with your witness and blessed proclamation, that "the Lord is risen indeed", that Immanuel "conquered Death", that Christ your King "has brought life and immortality to light",—and that life's weary, life's satiated world looks at you mockingly, looks at you indifferently, as though it would say: What concern is your preaching of blessing regarding Death to us; rather offer us a soft, sweet, tempting poison, painlessly and without agony to sink away in Death.

So has Easter ceased to address and to inspire the world around us. It no longer asks after your Easter. Not after triumph over Death, does it stretch out its clammy, weary hand. Rather it finds your enthu-

siasm about Life foolish, and your deep enmity against Death unreasonable. Not Death, rather Life is the source of suffering and sorrow. Death delivers, Death reconciles, Death brings forgetfulness. And therefore to Death, not to Life, must remain the last word. Not the optimism of your imagined Easter but the pessimism of its love for the grave, presently for the crematory, that consumes even the mortal remains to ashes, is become the Gospel, the good tidings of our age.

That somber, that self-sufficient, and in its somberness yet half laughing, half mocking mood of spirits, has not remained without influence upon the church of Christ.

The church is not of the world, but lives *in* the world. It consists of the same men and women and children who at stated times gather in the house of prayer to honor their Savior, and who at other times mingle with the great masses, in the life of society.

They too who are converted are therefore not yet entirely converted. Converted and transposed in the utterance of life, be it so; but for the rest even converts live far too greatly from the life of the world, live that life of the world, and undergo the constant impression, the continuous influence of it.

So, the dreadfulness of Death has gradually given way even within the walls of Christ's church; even from preaching the dread of Death and Hell, has for the larger part disappeared; many a dying-bed comes to an end without an utterance of faith; and even among God's children there have been those, who, ensnared in the bands of Hell, have followed the mocking pessimist in the awful way of suicide.

Thirst after Life and dread of Death have decreased among us. False, unholy ideas and per-

ceptions have found an entrance among us. Freshness and vigorous animation in the life-tone is lowered, and though as *one* man we still cleave fast to the Man of sorrows, Who overcame Death and Grave, yet in our circles the enthusiasm, the animation, that went forth from Easter, is by far no more what it once was, even in human remembrance.

This is a judgment of God.

In nothing more, than in the Quickening of Jesus from the dead, has He shown the exceeding greatness of His Divine power. The utmost that could be done is done, to cause the breath of Life to go forth richly and abundantly into this world shadowed by death and suffering.

But the darkness has not known the light of Life, has not seen it, has not desired it; at most it has played with it, and God's children too have remained far behind, in glorifying their God in this excellency of His grace.

Our Easter also has been externalized.

And so came the natural judgment, that the sense, the taste for this triumph of Life over Death grew less; then gradually wore out in the world; and now, as result that was almost unavoidable, in the circle of believers, it has lost, o, so much of its power.

So it has come to pass, that in Death gradually nothing is seen except the *dying.*

Death, so it was deemed, and so it was said, was the necessity of nature, by which every man, born of a woman, after his thread of life had been cut off, ceased to live, blew out his breath and died.

That was the *all* of Death.

Result and outflow of a natural law; of something so unavoidable and unpreventable, that every one knows in advance, that that moment awaits him too.

But then it is only one moment. One breathes his last, and Death is done. Death is dying. Nothing else. Nothing more.

And what does your Easter amount to?

If your Easter jubilation implied triumph; that a means is offered us to escape from dying, then at least for a time they who are in love with life might accept it. Not for too long. For a man of a hundred years has no enviable lot. And what would it be at an age of two centuries? Then one would wish your Easter joy away, and even long for Death.

But your Easter does not provide this. And you, who rejoice in Immanuel Who arose, *die yourself*. From the natural necessity of dying you can not get away. Sometimes even the pious die very early, and are taken away before half their days are spent.

All the good of Easter can only come when Death has been executed upon you. Hence Death remains. The grave you cannot escape. Thus all the weight of Easter must lie in what comes *after* Death. And, of course, with this our self-sufficient age does not bother itself. It scarcely knows whether after Death there shall yet be anything. And when it wants to speak from its height, it speaks at most of a *hope* of immortality.

This then is the fundamental wrong, that you say: Death, that is when I *die,* and thus Life is, that I do *not* pass away into nothingness, but that I still am, and that after my dying, I shall still be.

This indeed is a denial of God's Word, a bold contradiction of the testimony of the Lord.

No, Death is no necessity of nature, and if man had not fallen, no Death would ever have come upon him.

Death only came in this world upon man, when

he fell away from his God, and put himself under the unholy influence of Satan.

Your Savior is come that "He might destroy the power of him, who had the power of Death, i. e. the Devil" (Hebr. 2:14).

Therefore in the Old Covenant God taught His people, that Death makes unclean and that he who had touched a corpse, as one unclean, could not enter into His sanctuary.

Not when you continue in the fear of the Lord, O man, pure when first created of God, but when you violate His high command, *you shall die.*

Not first when you breathe your last, but at the very moment inwardly, by as much as Death enters into your soul, and inwardly destroys you, that presently he might also attack your body.

First *spiritual* Death within; then *physical* Death, when you sink away in the grave; and only after that the real Death, Death in its fulness, *eternal Death,* standing over against *eternal Life.*

So Death is not merely to breathe your last, when you die, but an evil, an unholy, a Satanic power, which by sin, and because of your sin, came upon you; which already now you carry about with you in the members of your soul; which presently enters into the members of your body; and only after your dying carries you off as its prey, eternally to corrupt you.

In Death dwells sin; to Death cleaves the curse; Death is an instrument of God, which He employs in His judgments, but which in every way stands over against Him and His holiness, because He Himself is the Life and the Source of Life.

It is from Death that all destruction of our inner life proceeds, all self-corruption to which the sinner

lends himself, all the devastation of pure human happiness of life.

Your dying, when you breathe your last, is surely part of Death, but it is by no means all of Death. Rather that dying is but a single, very brief, weak utterance of Death.

Death destroys far more terribly *before* your dying, than *in* your dying. And most terribly, most dreadfully shall Death cause its awful working to be felt *after* dying.

Those millions in the days of Noah, that "ate and drank, and thought 'to-morrow we die'," fancied that when they sank away into the watery depths, it was done with Death. And now, after four thousand years, they are still "in the prisonhouse of Death" (1 Pet. 3:19). And what are these four thousand years, compared with the eternity that still awaits them?

Thus two representations of Death here stand over against one another.

On one side the representation of the world, which alas is still shared by many Christians, as though Death were nothing other, than that we, according to the law of nature, once must die.

And over against this, on the other side, the representation of God's Word, that Death is the power of Satan, an unclean, unholy, deeply sinful power, which not as a law of nature, but as a curse of sin has come upon us, already now destroys us spiritually, presently makes us return to dust, and eternally holds us bound in its somber snares.

To which of these will you hold yourself? To the world, which knows nothing of it, and only counts with what it sees of Death? Or to your God, Who knows Death in its bone and marrow, Who first threatened us with Death, then has brought Death

upon us, and, unless you convert yourself to Christ, has cut off every means, whereby man might escape now and for ever the terrible power of Death, which is to say, of eternal Death.

And then indeed you have no choice. Then you *must* believe your God. Then it is, as He declares it unto you, and everything the world prates in its lightsomeness, is nothing but play of imagination and self-deceit.

Deeply impress it therefore upon yourself, that Death is this evil, this unholy, this all your human happiness for ever destroying power. Feel it for yourself, and instruct your children in it, that Death by nothing else than by the unholy tie of your guilt and your sins is anchored in you and to you, and thereby has power over you.

Understand this and ponder over it, that there is no moving or changing of this crushing power of Death, so long as you seek to defend yourself against Death. Is the corpse in the grave able to raise itself, and throw off the stone, under which it lies buried?

If you understand this, and thus know, what Death is, and are no longer mistaken in the nature and the power and the violence of Death, then you will understand your Easter, you will rejoice in the fact that "Immanuel arose", and with full draughts drink in the comfort and the gladness, when the blessed evangel strikes your ear: The Lord is *risen indeed!*

For now Christ stands before you, as God's Hero, Who "took upon Himself the flesh and blood of children", and, in that flesh and blood, took hold of Death, attacked him in his loins, fought with Death for the prize of all God's elect, and gave Himself so far over into his power, that the Himself breathed

His last, and commended His spirit into His Father's hands.

Then the earth wept, because it seemed, as though this Hero of God in His terrible Penuel overpowered, overcome by Death, was conquered. And, of course, if in this most awful of conflicts He had gone under, the power of Death would forever have remained unbroken, and every one of us would for ever have been ensnared as his prey in the bands of Hell.

That was the hour of darkness, when all demons rejoiced with Satanic joys, and God's angels sadly covered their faces.

But after that hour comes the turning-point. On the third your Savior rises. Not seemingly so, not in the imagination of His disciples, but in very deed He rises from the dead.

And now Death is frightened, and Satan trembles, and all the demons shrink back; but God's angels step in. They rejoiced before any human being was yet able to thank God for Jesus' Resurrection.

"Why seek ye," so they ask, "the Living among the dead? Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth. Behold, He is risen from the dead, and goeth before you. We, God's angels, declare it unto you."

And so your Savior overcame.

So He *lives,* not for Himself, but for you, that with the arm of strength He might hinder Death, now conquered and broken in his power, from ever attacking again one of God's elect.

So He breaks the power of Death, even now in your soul, presently in your dying, more richly after your dying, and once full gloriously, when He returns on the clouds, and you will stand in glory, and in the end will see Death himself cast into the lake of fire.

And therefore sing praises unto the Lord, Who is alive for ever more, at this our Easter, that once more returns.

Live it over again in all its depths what it says, that your Savior for your sake sank away in Death, but now is *risen indeed.*

And with that "risen indeed" raise in your heart and make vocal in your lips, against Death and Grave the triumph call full of holy irony: *"O Death, where is thy sting, O Grave, where is thy victory?"*

Unto God be glory, *"Who giveth us the victory* through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

III

"ROSE AGAIN ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES."

HAT poor world!

It has no more feast of Resurrection. In its halls of pleasure every hymn to Immanuel Who arose is silenced. No more Easter flower may unfold upon her fields. All it retained of the age-old Christian feast is, "The second Easter day" on which to indulge in pleasure.

And as you go abroad in Reformed, Lutheran, Romish or Grecian lands, you find no difference. Wherever the "enlightening" has penetrated, a dark cloud passed upon life and covered things with the darkness of death. Little children still believe in the grave that was opened. Country folks in distant parts do the same. Among every nation the Lord our God still has "His own", a "little flock" that preserves the faithfulnesses, and lives by Jesus' Resurrection life. But with the masses, throughout all Europe, during the last quarter century, Easter faith is radically worn out. Philosophers of this age went before, scholars followed with staring seriousness, and when by these leaders in the path of science it was shown, that all miracle is absurd, and that so also the miracle of Jesus' Resurrection from the dead is a legend, second-hand scholars, in company of those that were enlightened and civilized, have dismissed Easter, and hoarsely the man in the street sang it after and with them, that we were done with Easter, excepting always the holiday.

Go along the streets and highways of our great cities, and knock at the palaces where the tone-giving classes dwell, and if you find one house in ten, in which on Easter-day the family kneels in thanksgiving and worship before Jesus' Resurrection from the dead, you will find your boldest expectation surpassed.

People at large are beyond it. Death itself is defied. Every one must die. Then let it be done philosophically. So one yields to the necessity of nature. Whether on the other side of the grave anything follows, no one knows. Misery certainly there is none. Why then fear? And as a protest against fear the grave is made invisible underneath floral wreaths, till presently the grave-digger does away with the faded flowers.

Your heart trembles as you think of this. And yet, so it is and not otherwise. Death marks the end of all, and yet the world has wilfully blown out the lamp of Resurrection.

Philosophically to die and aesthetically to be buried, became the secret of weary submission, in which the de-Christianized world has withdrawn itself at the open grave.

Most of all it was preferred to see the grave disappear altogether, and so return is made to the *cremation of the body* of the ancient heathen world.

The course of history with respect to this is striking.

Paradise passed away, and death came, and then age upon age peoples and nations have pondered, how they might triumph over death. In old Egypt, with its glorious book of the dead, and in its "eternal cities of the dead" with embalmed body in the sarcophagus, the triumph seemed achieved.

But the dead city remained a city of the dead. There was no life there. And the thought of dying set in somberness again, till the mysteries in imperial Rome brought a change, and in the days of Bethlehem a wondrous expectation took hold of the peoples of a deliverance from death that was to come.

And Jesus came. And Jesus died. And Jesus rose from the dead.

And, listen, from the Jerusalem of the Jews ascends for the first the song of a Psalm of life.

And the nations listen. The cry of "Immanuel arose" captures ear and heart. It is as though the shroud drops away, and as though a blush of immortal life imprints itself upon the radiant face.

Nation after nation seeks Baptism. Before long all of Southern Europe is won for Christ. The other part of Europe comes along. And long before the middle ages are ended, the whole then known world is Christianized, and Easter is celebrated in every home, and from sea to sea, and from the rivers to the end of the earth, resounds the song of jubilation, that Jesus overcame death, and in one breath it is asked: "O Death, where is thy sting; O Grave, where is thy victory!" And the *"The Lord is risen indeed"* imparts every year, as Easter returns, new vigor of life and new courage for life to the heart.

So it glittered, but not all of what glittered in the jubilation was "the gold of faith". Far from it. With fulness of faith sang among all nations only small minorities. The masses, then too, were worldly. Money rather than faith and pleasure rather than joys of heaven. But one was adrift upon the stream of churchly life. There was no desire yet to remove the sacred picture from the frame and tear it up.

Life was more beautiful than death, and therefore Easter was more interesting than the grave.

There was still something of the dread of death in the heart, and therefore Jesus attracted. He had swallowed up death and grave.

At length one could not imagine life without Easter.

Jesus' Resurrection, that one might himself once rise, was the faith and the hope that was printed in all hearts and that put its stamp upon life.

And there was the fault.

To be able to believe in one's own resurrection, one willingly believed that Jesus arose. Yet the holy apostle had confessed the very opposite: "If the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised" (1 Cor. 15:16).

But did the world have to bother itself with the apostle? Egotistic is its worldly existence, and its egotism should triumph even over the grave. Easter must be for our sakes, prelude of a second existence of joy, when the joys of this world have ended in the grave.

So Easter did not bloom upon the root of personal faith, but upon communal egoism, and from that same egoism it borrowed the design, presently, when the Prince of lies should close up the grave of Jesus again, bravely and with unbroken courage to resist that lie of the Legend.

First then that unbelief crawled and creaped. In the circles of Free-masons and of barren thinkers faith in our Easter was long abandoned. But this was kept quiet. Among friends laughter began at the simplemindedness of the people that still rejoiced. But it was not openly confessed. This was not dared. A cry of abhorrence would have gone up,

if then already openly in the market-place Jesus' Resurrection had been denied.

But gradually the stream of this unbelief grew in volume. What was first a brooklet, swelled to become a river. Till at last the ministers of God's Word began to lend themselves to this unbelief, and to the theology of those that attacked the Scriptures, and finally even the preachers of the Gospel witnessed against Immanuel.

This was done some fifty years ago. Then it broke out and through. No dam or dike was of any more avail. And indeed, for a while, in the first surprise, a murmur, a mumbling was heard among the masses. But in ten years' time even that mumbling died away, and then the day was won. Only "fanatics" and "zealots" still felt offended. But to the world Easter was lost. And as gladly and jubilantly as once it had sounded from one part of the land to the other: "The Lord is risen indeed," so venemously and passionately it now resounded in the bar-room and from the pulpit, from the university chair and in the yellow press: That Jesus should have risen is nothing but a fable.

So coarse egoism underwent its righteous punishment. God Himself took away from the turbulent egotistical world the sacred pledge of faith in the Resurrection of Immanuel.

God no longer tolerated play with the holiest.

You can believe in Jesus' Resurrection only by "the Spirit of truth", and Jesus Himself added thereto: "Whom the world can not receive, because *it seeth him not, neither knoweth him.* But," continued Jesus, "ye know him; for he dwelleth in you, and *shall be in you*" (St. John 14:17).

And again: *"The world shall no more see me,*

but ye shall see me, for I live, and ye shall live" (vs. 19).

With this holy saying the church that had become worldly had mocked. She had wanted to make it untrue. It was her desire, that the world, *without* faith, should see the risen Savior.

And that egotistic Easter, that unholy Easter, in His righteous judgment God the Lord has snatched away from the world. And now it is again: He who believes, *sees it,* but the world does not see it, and can not see it, because she will not surrender her unholy spirit in exchange for the Holy Spirit.

Although there seems thus to be loss, in the truth there is gain.

Jesus' own word that *"the world can not see Him"* is again become truth, and in the preaching of the faith the full, rich, sacred meaning of Easter has come into the light again in all its glory.

He who now still believes in Easter, stands again where the apostles stood.

Spiritual depth has come back in our Resurrection faith.

Think of what Paul wrote to the wealthy in sporting Corinth (15:4): I have not preached unto you merely, that Jesus rose from the dead, but in addition to this, that Jesus rose *according to the Scriptures.*

What does that say, what does it imply?

According to the Scriptures, does this mean: According to the Evangelical narrative, according to the report of Jesus' Resurrection, which both Matthew and John have left us, that they have seen Jesus alive on the very day on which He rose?

It can not be this. For when Paul wrote to the Corinthians, there was no Gospel yet in writing,

there existed no New Testament. There was nothing but the Old.

According to the Scriptures can only mean therefore, that you should believe, that Jesus was raised *according to the Scriptures of Moses and all the prophets.*

It is an echo to what the risen Savior Himself said on the way from Emmaus to Jerusalem, when He explained to Cleopas and Luke, going through Moses and all the prophets, that the Son of man must suffer all these things, and that that way of sorrows would end in Resurrection glory.

Rose *according to the Scriptures.* Not merely according to a single accidental word in those Scriptures of the Old Covenant, where there was mention of resurrection, or metaphorically resurrection was indicated.

No, *according to the Scriptures,* i. e. according to those Scriptures as a whole. According to those Scriptures in their rich fundamental significance.

Among all other nations it was altogether a groping about in darkness. But upon Israel a light had risen, the light of God's holy Revelation. And of that Revelation the image had been caught *in those Scriptures.*

So those Scriptures of the Old Covenant imparted an altogether different look upon our human life, upon our human existence, upon the relation between God and man, upon the relation in man between soul and body, upon dying, upon the grave, and upon what beyond the grave should be the portion of each, in eternal sorrow or in everlasting joy.

According to those Scriptures not every individual walked by himself alone on the pathway of life, but all walked together as one generation, as the one

humanity. Sunken away in one guilt. Going toward one death, and presently the eternal death. Helpless. Lost. Not salvable from and in itself. So that no flowers on the grave could avail, and every disguise is nothing but self-deception.

But also, *according to those Scriptures* there was a Savior, a Redeemer, a Goel appointed of God. God's Annointed was to assume our flesh. He should be our Head. We should obtain again a Prophet, a Priest, a King. As a hero He would go before all. He would attack the powers of Hell and Satan. He would fight for us even to the blood.

But then, when He in and through death had shifted the burden of wrath and of guilt from us, then *He would lengthen His days.* Then there would be resurrection. Then life would rise from death.

If He did not arise, it would be, that God was vanquished and that Satan had won. But also, this was not possible, for as truly as God lives, God's counsel shall stand.

And therefore *according to the Scriptures* He could not be held of death.

"Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, Thou wilt not suffer thy Holy One to see corruption."

And so Jesus is risen.

And all they who believed *according to the Scriptures,* and have confessed and lived, have felt, that so it should be, and so was.

According to the Scriptures, and *with* those Scriptures there goes through the world an other, a sacred life-stream, which crosses the stream of the world.

And across that stream of the world there hangs nothing but the shadow of death. But across that

holy stream according to the Scriptures there sparkles the light, tintillates the life.

Here is Easter.

Here is Resurrection.

Here is Immanuel, *Who arose.*

For this reason the Old Testament had to be so violently opposed. Among some churches it was as good as put aside. Among us the memory is alive of days, when "New Testaments" were distributed for Bibles. And as though this were not enough, criticism arrayed itself to pull down the entire structure of the Old Testament. Among those who follow criticism there is in fact no more Old Testament. It is fallen apart. It has shown itself to be full of fables. It no longer exists as Testament. What for Jesus was "The Scriptures", for the wise of our age is passed away.

And of course, when what Jesus honored as "the Scriptures" does no longer exist for you, then of itself falls away what should have happened *according to those Scriptures.* Thus what Paul wrote to the Corinthians: that Christ died *according to the Scriptures,* and that on the third day He was raised *according to the Scriptures,* was altogether imagination and selfdelusion.

There are no Scriptures, and thus nothing can happen according to "the Scriptures". And so with the Scriptures of the Old Testament all our Easter passed away from the perception of the soul.

By nature a representation had been common among the peoples, which ended in death. Then God had given in Israel an entirely different representation, and that representation lay documented in the Scriptures.

Now this God-given representation is rejected again, and thus also the Scriptures, wherein it lay proclaimed.

So return was made to what once the heathen imagined. From life they sank back again into death. From the heavenly *light* return was made to the world's *darkness.*

And so Easter could not stand.

Remained in the grave according to the world's axioms! became the verdict of our age.

But among those that are known of the Lord in the very face of that denial, the joyful confession of Jesus' Resurrection from the dead, is enriched and deepened.

The choir of those who still raise the Easter psalm, may have lost in numbers, in purity of tone it has gained. Among those that still sing this there are none who do not sing unto Immanuel *from the heart.* The life of the Spirit purls in their songs of jubilation.

And to what else do you owe this, save to the fact that now also your existence of soul, your experience of soul, all the world of your thoughts, is, what Paul would say, *according to the Scriptures.* Standing over against what the world puts forth as wisdom, but joined and adapted to what once God through Moses and the Prophets has revealed. Acknowledging your death, dying away from your false life in Christ, and now, through death, reaching after that eternal life, that Jesus, through death and grave, has brought to light.

A life, that indeed, presently, when God calls you, shall only then shine out before you in its fulness, but yet a life, of which now, already here, you feel the refreshing breath waft itself toward you, of

which you are conscious in the fellowship of saints, that operates as an uplifting and animating power in your heart, that ever casts its light before you on the pathway of your life, and that only for a while allows itself to be held back by your sin.

Easter therefore does not come in addition *to* our life, but it *is* our life. Immanuel, Who arose, is to us the luminous center of history, from which radiate toward us all the beams of joy and exalted gladness. And what Immanuel became to the history of the ages, that He is become in a far more deeply felt sense to the history of our own heart; the central point about which moves all the life of our soul.

IV

"IT SHALL BRUISE THY HEAD."

S often as our glorious Easter returns, our God and Father opens up again for His people on earth *the* source of rich and abundant comforting. For though the Lord's gifts of grace are innumerable, and though all His Word is a staff for the pilgrim on earth that keeps him from stumbling and a light on his path, yet among the many deeds of the Lord's almightiness there is nothing that in richness of comforting can be put on a line with the quickening of Christ from the dead.

"Who is he that condemneth?" asked the holy apostle (Rom. 8:34), and he answers: "It is Christ that died; *what is more, that is also risen again.*" And in his epistle to the church at Ephesus the self-same apostle jubilates in "the *exceeding greatness of the Lord's power,* which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead" (1:20). And if you have nothing yet when you have forgiveness of your sins except you are also *justified* before God, hear then how Christ was indeed delivered up for our sins, but is quickened for our justification. Yea, to express this more strongly still Paul even writes to the church at Colosse, "that in his resurrection Christ has spoiled hellish principalities and powers, has made a show of them openly, and by his resurrection from the dead has triumphed over them" (2:15).

This already tells us, what an altogether unique significance the resurrection has in the rich fulness of the work of grace, and that a child of God does

not yet understand what it is that *his Savior rose*, so long as he does not glory in that resurrection, as the source of his comfort.

In that wondrous paradise, in which so much has been experienced of unfathomable depth, and of which after all we know so very little, there went forth a prophecy from the side of God, which is the mother of all prophecy and of all salvation, that has come according to the plan of this prophecy. And this prophecy was, that a conflict should arise of life and death between God's people and Satan; that in that conflict Satan would cast down the woman's seed by bruising His heel; but that after that that seed of the woman should bruise Satan's head.

To such a conflict it would come, not between Satan and the world, nor yet between Satan and the loyal natural man. On the contrary by nature all that was born of the flesh, would make common cause with Satan, kneel down before Satan, and though it be unwillingly, yet would do according to Satan's will. No, that conflict should originate exclusively between Satan and *God's people*, for there could come no enmity, except God Himself first put it there; and in what heart has that enmity ever been put by God Himself, except He regenerated such a heart and as Da Costa sang: "begot again such a child of man unto a new comprehension".

In that conflict things would go on strenuously, and the bitterness of that conflict, to speak after the manner of man, would endure endlessly; yea, that conflict still goes on; and no end *can* come to it before Christ returns upon the clouds and Satan is forever bound and cast into the lake of fire.

More still, in that struggle forces would seemingly be most unequal. Satan always the mighty one, who drew by far the greatest part of the children of men

to his side; and over against this God's people as a "little flock", seven thousand who have not bent their knee to Baal, a Gideon's band, the "worm Jacob". Yea, in this conflict it was for no single moment to appear, as though by greater numbers, choicer talent or more efficient arms, God's people, even if they did not win, yet could hold their own in the fray.

On the contrary, all power must be of God, from Him all counsel, unto Him all glory.

Only because He worked, no one would be able to resist; and the power in that conflict whereby He would keep His people standing, would be the power of *His Word.*

See, that Word is the only thing that God would give his people along on their pilgrim journey, the only weapon that the Lord would give His people in that bitter conflict.

In Paradise He does nothing yet. All things rather remain, after the fall, as they had been from the beginning. All His people receive is *a Word.* The word that Satan's head shall be bruised.

A word of promise; a word of comfort; a word that offers guarantee for final triumph.

He who took that word, fastened himself to it, and believed that word of his God, he knew, that the end would be glorious, and by that blessed knowledge itself became invincible to Satan.

But also, he who rejected that word or left it alone, or in his unbelief contradicted it, he weakened and succumbed and was bound in the end to join the ranks of Satan.

And herein lies the antithesis from paradise on between the Lord's people, and those that oppose them. For to that people the Lord's Word has become the supreme jewel of their soul, the inheritance

of their race. That Word they have heard; they have listened to it; it has sounded like music in the ear of their soul. It has become to them the word of spiritual magic, by which everytime they raised themselves up again. And never would their weariness bring them so low, but that strongly, as with piercing voice, that wondrous word of divine promise as an echo, to what God once spake, resounded again in their heart. Then they revived again; then they were comforted again; then they kindled again in holy enthusiasm, and then in the midst of most cruel suffering, they stood comforted with respect to that suffering.

The head of Satan would be bruised, and of course a serpent, the head of which is bruised, can do nothing more to you. A child can stand by the side of it, because the monster can no more move, its tooth can no longer wound, its poison can no longer harm.

And that is what God's real people wanted. It was not enough that Satan could no longer persecute and pursue them. Satan must not merely be bound, so that they might be free from him. No, Satan with bruised head must lie there before all eyes, that God's people, with their children, could stand by, and refresh themselves with the sight of how *completely* by God's wondrous potency *Satan's power to destroy* had been destroyed.

Has that moment of triumph, that hour of victory, already come for God's people, or does the peon of that victory still tarry?

In answering this question be serious, be honest, and play not with words.

No, in the full sense that triumph has *not yet* been reached.

Satan indeed still has power. The church of God experiences this still every moment and in all lands. The enemy of our soul everytime arrays himself to ruin us personally and the heart of our children. In the thoughts and deliberations, that trouble the nations, his influence is ever yet observable.

So bound that he can no more move himself, his head so bruised, that he can make no more advances, Satan is not yet. His poison has by no means yet lost its venom. And the hour, when he shall be cast forever into the lake of fire, does not come, till Christ has appeared upon the clouds. Yea, even this return of Christ must yet be preceded by a dreadful revelation of the power of Satan, when the "man of sin" comes and the Antichrist shall be revealed, who opposes everything that is called God, that he might himself be worshiped as God.

The pleasing representation, that Satan had indeed a place in the Old Tetsament, but after the Cross of Golgotha, had been robbed of all power, must be denied in the name of Holy Scripture, and is indeed contradicted by the cruel, bitter experience of soul on the part of every child of God.

Yea, truly, Satan is still alive. Satan still exercises power and lays his snares, and age after age the church of God, and in that church all the people of God must continue to pray: "Lead us not into temptation, *but deliver us from the evil One.*"

Once the completed triumph surely comes, but it can not come, except first all the wickedness of Satan shall have spent itself, and our Savior's realm of glory shall have been ushered in.

Thus to this extent God's people still live *by prophecy;* God's real child still feeds on the paradise-promise; and pants with thirst after that glorious hour, when all conflict shall cease, when the last

enemy shall be put under Jesus' feet, and God shall become all in all, that all His people may have part with Him in His glory.

But even this is not all.

For the paradise-promise by itself is perfectly sufficient for our comforting, and by itself we should not need anything additional to it; but since the days of paradise that promise has *been put to the test.*

Between us and that promise stands the Cross of Golgotha.

In that promise there was not merely something *promised,* but also something *threatened;* and what that threat implied, has been executed at Golgotha. The Woman's seed appeared, and that Woman's seed *had its heels bruised,* so that Christ was cast down, and fell and was carried out to the grave of dissolution.

In part this awful fratricide committed on the Son of God supported the reality and the trustworthiness of the promise; for so it had been foretold. That it should come to this, had been announced. And the coming of the Seed of the woman and the fall of that Elect One had been prophecied.

For that very reason it could not rest with the Cross.

Therefore after the Cross an altogether unique event *must* follow.

For had that Cross been the last, and had we received nothing more than the Paradise-promise; our soul would have refused to be comforted, because then seemingly Satan would have won his case with God, and God's counsel would not have stood.

The Seed of the woman truly bruised in the heel; even bruised far more terribly than prophecy would lead one to expect; bruised unto the death; bruised

unto the depths of hell; bruised unto the curse in the second death; but thereby also the second half of the Divine prophecy pitifully thwarted, and that wherein lay the comforting of God's people, forever cut off.

And see, at this point the Resurrection of Christ enters in between. At this crossing of the roads of prophecy your risen Savior appears before you. When you have come to this turn in God's way, God's angel meets you with a song of Immanuel Who overcame.

Picture it clearly to yourself, what in that grave of Jesus was at stake.

Satan is no imaginary being, but a truly existing, terrible mighty spirit, who has an entire host of spirits at his command. By the fall in Paradise, man, who had been commissioned to protect the garden against the approaches of Satan, had admitted this terrible power of Satan into this world, and had thereby created the possibility for Satan, of preparing the whole of our human race, with all its might and power, its gifts and talents, to be an instrument for himself, wherewith he would antagonize God's work, attack God's people and destroy the counsel of God.

And, that power of Satan in our race was not imaginary, but operated and fermented and bred in all the life of the nations and in the personal life and in the passions of the human heart. Till even in Israel that power of Satan had penetrated. Throughout almost all the ages you see Israel run after Baal, or serve the calves, or bend the knee to Moloch and Ashteroth.

Almost every power of the world organizes itself into a well-ordered power, that stands inimically

over against God. So do the philosophers in their science; the artists in their temple of art; the priests at their altars; the legislators in their enactments; the kings in their government; the generals at the head of their legions; all people in their chase after money and sensual pleasure; every child of man in the impure passions of his heart.

And in against that power God must make true His promise; render His people capable of bearing arms and keep them standing; and cause His Immanuel to appear at the root of Israel, and by that Immanuel bring the miracle to pass, to remain spotless in His holiness, and yet to atone all the sins of His people.

And the Lord shows His mightiness; He knows and calls His own; He plants in Abraham the noble vine of Israel.

The Lord goes on.

When necessary the flood, that saves Noah alone, is His instrument. Sodom and Gomorrah He overturns and rains on them fire and brimstone. At the Red Sea He controls Pharaoh and his riders. And however much in Israel apostacy gets the upperhand everytime again, yet He knows His faithful ones, and throughout all ages He has seven thousand who continue to call upon His name.

And now it comes at last.

Bethlehem is baptized in the gleams of the eternal light. The Babe rests in Mary's arms. Immanuel *is come*.

The world does not observe it, and even in Israel there are but a few who believe; but *Satan knows it*, and the demons tremble at that dreadful knowledge.

Hence from this moment on all Satan's art and purpose is, to risk himself with that Immanuel in a conflict of life and death.

Now is the hour of decision. *Now* it must be made out, whether *he* shall win in the end, or ..... the by-him-so-deeply-hated God.

This you trace already in Bethlehem's massacre of the innocents, and in the flight to Egypt. You see it more clearly when Jesus is tempted of him in the wilderness. But it appears in full light first, when it is evident that it must come to a fight in the open, and Jesus appears in Israel as Prophet, presently as Priest and King, and it must be shown who is the stronger.

Never have demons broken loose indeed as during the three years of tension between heaven and hell. Never has there been among a people so many possessed. Never has the wickedness, treachery and baseness of the human heart been in evidence so terribly, as in what you may call the three year's passion-history of the Son of man.

They know Him the demons; and they say it openly that He is the Son of David and Israel's Messiah; but by that saying they stir up the evil passions in Israel against Him; till at length almost the whole people, with their priests and leaders at their head, rise up against Him, and everything calls for His blood; and Barabbas, the murderer, by the loud calls of the bloodthirsty multitudes, is chosen *above Jesus.*

And indeed this evil plan succeeds. For Jesus does nothing in return. Seemingly He runs of Himself and of His own initiative into the jaws of destruction. Instead of continuing to hide in Galilee, He goes of Himself to Jerusalem. Judas, whose inner thoughts He had long read, He allows to remain in His company. He goes up to the temple. If you will, He provokes the Pharisees and spares the priests in no particular.

He does nothing to escape. Just before His arrest He still shows what power is His, when He causes the soldiers to fall backward. But that power, which is at His service, He does not use.

Willingly He allows Himself to be bound, and as a Lamb He goes to the slaughter.

That, Satan did not understand.

He had willed that Jesus should offer resistance, should fight back, should retaliate; even Peter he tempted to draw the sword, and therewith after the manner of men to fight for Jesus.

But Jesus does not want this. He *wills* to die. And when Satan entertains still one more fear, even the fear that Jesus shall come down from the Cross and upset all his plan, this too does not happen; it does not take place however much he lets Jesus be taunted by the priests, and however much they say: "If thou art the Son of God, come down from the cross."

So Jesus goes under, and Satan actually celebrates his victory, and hell its triumph.

For Satan knew no more terrible power than *Death*. Against every other instrument man had found defence; but not against *Death*. No one could face Death. To Death every one had to pay his toll. And since now it had come so far, that Jesus also had been conquered by that Death, Satan deemed himself certain of his victory.

God had been beaten back. He, Satan, had triumphed!

But now the mightiness of the Lord comes in between. More still, now it *had* to step in between. Now or never it must be made out and decided, whether there was power in God *also against death:* and whether Immanuel, even though He had been

cast into Death, could nevertheless be saved and brought back from that Death.

And this is the glory of Easter; this the eternal jubilation of Jesus' resurrection, that then, at that decisive moment, God's mightiness *has* appeared, and the exceeding greatness of the strength of His Divine power has been exhibited, to liberate His Immanuel even from the bands of Death, and with divine majesty to snatch Satan's booty away from him.

To snatch it away, not by taking up the soul of Jesus into heaven. That could take place after the dying. No, but by bringing back from Death the Immanuel, the *Incarnated* Word *in that Flesh;* to make known unto Him the way of life; and to bring about that His Holy One should not see corruption.

And this took place on the third morning. When the watchers fled, and God's angels descended, and the stone was rolled away, and He Who had so recently died on the Cross appeared again in the midst of His disciples, and showed them the marks of the nails in His hands, and the wound of the spear in His side.

For over against this, Satan stood entirely helpless.

Against this, no single instrument had been prepared for Satan.

He had to look on and see it. See it in its far reaching results with respect to his own lot and the future of heaven and earth.

Now God had conquered, and potentially Satan had forever been beaten back.

Now the hour could be foretold and the moment be anticipated, when for once and for always his head should be bruised.

For though now Satan is still alive and still

heavily armored, and though great power is still left him, to disturb God's church and God's children, yet God's faithful ones no longer fear.

For see, whenever Satan attacks them again, there always stands between him and their heart that risen Savior, Who having received all power in heaven and on earth, and seated at the right hand of the Father, continually calls out to His own: "No one can pluck you out of *My* hand!"

V.

"AND BECAME AS DEAD MEN."

T the emptied grave of Christ Matthew and Mark tell of *one* angel, while Luke and John record *two*, and thus says uncertain criticism that *no* angels were seen.

How cold and barren, how superficial and external this sort of view is!

You, O, pitiful criticism, in the face of that angel and the miracle grave would only have believed, if two or three officers of justice had stood by; from second to second had written down what they saw and heard; had sworn with oaths to the correctness of these two or three reports and signed with their names had passed them in to Pilate; and if by comparison these reports had perfectly agreed in every particular; to which of course it must be added, that these officers of justice could not be suspected of having secretly been in favor of Jesus; and finally that the official reports in duly stamped copy were still in existence without there being any doubt about their authenticity.

Then these critics would believe it. That is to say, in their chronicle they would annotate, that so it must have been seen and heard, after the manner of a captain, who, coming from sea, tells of this or that ship that has been sighted; but their soul would stand outside of it; under the impression of the mighty fact they would not come; and it would continue to go on outside of their heart and affections.

And yet this is what here counts. From everything that is told of Jesus' resurrection, one is

impressed, that whoever came to the grave, was *moved as by having come in touch with a higher world.*

This consternation that had mastered them, they communicated to all whom they met.

And the object of the fourfold narrative of the Evangelists is no other, than to bring about in your heart also something of that awe-struck feeling, so that you too might understand something of the *"power of His resurrection."*

At that open grave of Jesus it was no heavenly *firework* that glittered for one moment, presently to be extinguished, but a glow of heavenly fire was there ignited, destined to shine forth eternally; and only when you yourself perceive the fostering warmth of that glow in your own soul, does Jesus' resurrection become *living reality* to you.

Of course that glow of life shines out from Jesus Himself. From His most holy person. From soul and body both. If you will, more deeply still, from the Divine majesty that penetrated all of His human nature, and survived its self-destruction in death and conquered it.

From His most glorious triumph over grave and death.

But this indeed did not go on outside of nature and not outside of creation. For as in Ephrata's fields the angelic hosts of God descend to sing their song, and in Gethsemane angels come to minister to Jesus, and at His ascension into heaven angels form His escort, and as in the day of judgment Christ shall appear with all His holy angels, so now there is angelic concern when Jesus *rises from the grave.*

As a forked bolt of lightning, that at some ten feet distance from you strikes into the ground, and

blinds your eyes, so was that sudden appearance of an angel to the Roman soldiers, who kept watch at the closed and sealed grave of Jesus.

Even the ground on which they stood, at his appearance, trembled for one moment under their feet.

And when, surprised by that clear unexpected light, and frightened by that quaking of the ground, they saw coming forth from that light a form, like that of a man, clothed in snow-white glistening garments, anxious fear took hold of them, great terror overmastered them, and the effect was that they became as dead men.

Then they scattered, and came more dead than alive to the Sanhedrin at Jerusalem.

They did not lack in bravery. A powerful enemy they would have faced in battle, and would rather have remained dead on the spot, than have retreated.

But at that grave there operated a power from *a higher world.*

And against this no sword stroke could avail.

And, *as having become dead* they fled.

So have the Roman soldiers become frightened; but *not* Mary, and *not* the Magdalen.

They too at first were frightened but they did not flee.

"Fear not," the angel said quieting them, "for I know that ye seek Jesus, Who was crucified."

This makes all the difference.

He who, like the Roman soldier, at the grave misses every tenderer tie to Jesus, is frightened, and must be frightened, as soon as the power of the higher becomes perceptible; while he who has ties of love and ties of faith that bind him to Jesus, who seeks Jesus, also seeks that higher world, and when the first trepidation is past, that higher appearance

affects him blessedly and blissfully; and therefore the Marys do not shrink back.

Their soul revives at that selfsame angel appearance; those soldiers, otherwise so brave, *become as dead men.*

This was more than a fact, herein was *prophecy.*

Those soldiers at the grave represented the sum-total of the astonishing power, which at that time in the *Roman empire* dominated the world.

That Mary with the Magdalene on the other hand the Kingdom of God, the people that were to appear under Jesus as King, and under that heavenly Captain, would wage war against that terrible power of the world.

And then it went hard against hard.

No violence was spared, no cruelty evaded, blood was shed.

Till they clashed with one another, Rome's emperor with his countless legions and Jesus with His *martyrs.*

And what else was also here the end, save, that when the conflict was over, not merely Rome's legions, but all Rome's power, yea, the emperors themselves with their violence and wrath had *become as dead men,* and that the hosts of Jesus having life in the soul, have poured into that world sinking away from itself a new, a nobler, a richer *life.*

What were those Marys, after the standard of violence, compared with the unconquered warriors of Rome?

One stroke with the sword would have felled them.

And yet *not* the soldiers, but the Marys have won the day, because Jesus, Who arose, worked in and through them.

Jesus, in His rising itself, set for the *fall* of the emperors of Rome, and for the *rising* of the Marys. The savor of death unto death, and the savor of life unto life, they stand also in those soldiers and in those Marys directly over against one another.

From the side of the world salvation has then been sought in invention. It has been imagined, that the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus. And thanks to this lie in the Sanhedrin and in the chief watch they breathed again.

And so criticism in our age has disposed of it. It has imagined, that the explanation lay in the disciples. Not in their intentional deception of others, but in their *self-deception.*

With this fancy about what the disciples have imagined, it was thought in these circles that they were rid of Jesus' resurrection.

But see, here again the selfsame effect, and once more *the savor of death* is come upon those who would not bow before the Resurrection of Jesus.

Is it no *savor of death,* that came upon all these circles, when you see, how in spiritual barrenness and pitiful doubt they have already extinguished their enthusiasm which was at first so ardent, and how they see the masses, whose leaders they pretended to be, wander off in the paths of sensuality and of the gain of money?

And over against this also the *savor of life* has gone out among the faithful of Jesus.

Their faith in Jesus' resurrection not wavering, but standing more securely than ever. Their number increasing. Their insights clarifying. Their influence waxing. And in our times the Resurrection of Immanuel limned in a depth of significance, which was not thought of even in the days of our fathers.

So Jesus reigns. He, Who had received power to have *life in Himself*, and thereby regained life from death, and can also bring life to you in the death of your sinful existence.

And now Easter is not a feast of time, to which the outpouring of the life of Jesus in your soul is bound.

That life-power of Jesus goes out by day and by night, and he who would truly be God's child, endeavors daily to glory in the working of that life power in his heart.

But even so the return of Easter maintains a sense and a significance of its own.

You may have backslidden. A savor of death may again have come over your soul. And to him with whom it has come to this, there sounds in the preaching of Easter a voice of exhortation, to seek again the life-power, which is in Jesus, and more seriously to implore God for the inworking of that higher life-power.

Take heed in behalf of your soul, that you do not blind yourself to the undeniable fact, that each Eastertide as it comes anew lifts you up to more life power, or makes your soul sink back into more serious barrenness.

That barrenness of soul also is a savor of death.

And, alas, there are among God's dear children, those who will wake up again early or late, but who now make all the impression, *that they too have become as dead men.*

VI.

"NOT POSSIBLE THAT HE SHOULD BE HOLDEN OF DEATH"

HE Christian's Easter was for ages, is, and shall be till the Lord's return, the feast of victory of Life over Death.

Death is the most terrible power that has become evident in the sphere of the world. Great is the power of *Knowledge,* greater still perhaps the power of *Love;* but Death in the mightiness that has become almightiness far excels both. Nothing can stand before *Death.*

And whatever mighty princes and world rulers have risen among the nations and what innumerable hosts they have collected, and with what fear and dread they have made the nations bend the knee before them, in the end even they have had to pay their toll to that still mightier prince of the grave, and have died away in death.

Innumerable, not in ciphers to be expressed, is the number of the children of men, which since sin exiled man from paradise, have bent before that Death. Every thirty years he strikes down some 1400 million people. Almost half a hundred million every year. Of David it was sung, that Saul had slain his thousands, but Jesse's son his ten thousand; but what are the trophies of a David compared with the millions upon millions victims of Death?

No, in all destroying power and in nothing sparing violence, the king of terrors far surpasses all power that under the Almighty has a place in His creation.

Nothing stops him. Carefulness and prudence,

art and science, heroic courage and devoted love may succeed for a few moments to prevent dying, and to avert mortal danger. But though death lets himself be repelled for a while, presently he returns with double reinforcements, till helplessly the physician shakes his head, and another precious life is snatched away by Death.

What has not the human heart suffered in the ages long gone by and in our own times, under the tyranny and irresistible superiority of Death. What tender holy ties have not been broken. What pillars of the family and of the social structure have not been pulled down. What mourning and soul-harrowing sorrow has he not brought about. What rivers of tears has he not caused to flow. What happiness of life has he not ruined.

And always Death came back without mercy even without pity.

One victim had not been sacrificed, but the second was demanded and the third appointed to die.

Death casts his somber shadow across every human pathway of life; he passes no house by where sooner or later he does not come to disturb home happiness; he respects neither poor nor rich; he puts down the strong man and the weak child; and before the newly born have outgrown their infant shoes, Death has already plucked away a third part of all these scarcely budded flowers and made them wilt in his trenches.

Hence do not believe it, when the worldling and the philosopher tell you, that for them Death has lost his terror. That he did not. Death is and remains terrible. And whether you will or not, always a chill comes over you, when you think of the dread moment, when your soul and your body shall be

torn apart and darkness shall cover you, and in the silent, deserted grave shall be your abode with all the dead that have gone before.

No, excitement is here of no avail, diversion is here no help, here no blindfolding of eyes can mislead you. Death is too terrible a *reality,* a superior power that shall some day also attack you; in such a way that you can offer no resistance, and that when once clutched by Death, you have no power, to free yourself from the gripping of his hand.

But, hark, in the midst of this dominion a call is sounded from One Who is mightier still. The call of Immanuel. The call of Jesus. The joyful sound of Him Whom God had sent, to deliver us from death and curse.

And what does the holy apostle say of this yet more mighty Immanuel?

This, *that it was impossible, that He should be holden of death* (Acts 2:24).

Death could attack Him, could cast Him down, could overpower Him, and make Him go down into the grave; but what Death could not do, after he had taken hold of Him, was *to hold Him.*

That was *impossible,* says the apostle of Jesus.

Impossible, because Death can hold him alone, whom he of his own free will has taken hold of and carried away. But such was not the case with Jesus.

Clearly and explicitly Jesus had declared: "No one taketh my life from me. I lay it down *of myself.* And because I lay it down of myself, therefore I take it back again of myself. This is the commandment, this the ordinance of life, which I have received of my Father" (John 10:1).

What was God's ordinance of life?

This indeed, that he who did no sin, should not

die, but that he who kneeled before sin, had to go into Death.

And Immanuel had never bent His knee to sin. He was immaculately pure in His conception, holy in His birth, and spotlessly pure all the days of His life, till He went away from the earth.

Hence according to the very ordinance of life in paradise Death had *no* claim on Him, and in no particular could he validate his right to take Jesus as his spoil.

Death could serve no summons on Jesus and could not steal Jesus away, but of His own free will Jesus could give Himself over unto Death, and allow Himself to be stolen away.

Already in His dying therefore Death did not stand superior in power to Jesus, but helpless over against Jesus, and it was Jesus Himself, Who by His moral superiority over impotent Death gave Himself.

Thus in Immanuel Death had to do with One Who was mightier than he, not first at His resurrection, but already before He died and in His dying.

Before Adam fell into sin Death had no power over him. But Adam was just as little able in spite of this to give himself over unto Death.

But both these meet in Jesus. Death had no power over Him, but He had power to give Himself over unto Death.

So He died; so He allowed Death to take away His earthly life; so He permitted His soul and body to be put asunder; and He let it come to pass, that His body was laid away in the grave.

But far from having Death therefore permanently triumph over Him, presently He triumphed over the terrible power of Death.

For as Death could not lay hold of Him nor get Him, except by His own willingness, neither could

Death for this very reason *hold* Him longer than He Himself would permit.

So when His hour had come, and He willed to free Himself again from the bands of Death, He repulsed Death, and went out free; and, having risen the third day, He gave us our glorious Easter.

Our *glorious* Easter! For even though by His rising from the dead there were no prospect offered us of our own redemption from the pit, it would still have been refreshing to our heart, to know, that in the face of that One at least Death had given up, and that thus there were bounds to his almost almighty violence.

A cruel tyrant, who thus far slew everyone, finally to be seen slain by one still mightier than he, already gives one a feeling of relief. If we knew nothing more, than that Death had found an opponent in Jesus, Who was too strong for *him,* this itself would give us the knowledge that there does exist One still more mighty than Death, and of itself our cry and our prayer would ascend unto Him: "Mighty Immanuel, Thou Who hast fought thyself free from Death, have an eye to our fear and our dread, and make the way clear before our feet, and give us results that shall be able to stand against that Death!"

But see, our Easter jubilation climbs far higher.

For before Immanuel willingly went into Death, He prophecied to His own, what was to come. He told them in advance, that Death should not be able to hold Him; He rejoiced in it beforehand, that He should ascend to heaven in glory; and, He added: "*Then I will draw you all unto me.* I am the Resurrection and the Life. He that believeth on me shall live, even though he were dead!"

Hence it was not, that for Himself Jesus had to go through the dark portals of Death, and for Himself would make a way of escape. No, for Himself He had nothing to do with Death. He did not need to go into death. And when glorified on Tabor He glistened before the eyes of His astonished disciples, just as He was He could have ascended from earth to heaven, without ever having undergone the chill touch of Death.

His going into Death was not for Himself, but *for us.* He died, not because He had to die, but to save us. All His life and dying is one mighty act of divine love, an act of divine mercy and unfathomable compassion *for others.*

All His struggle with Death therefore tends, *not* that He might Himself escape Death, but to break the power of Death over us. It happened alone for our sakes, in our behalf, to redeem us from death and fear.

And when we know this and read again, that it was impossible for Death to hold Him, that He rose, and actually showed Himself the mightier over that mighty Death, then we feel that by His Resurrection the stone is lifted from our *own* grave, and in His Resurrection there comes to us a delightful prophecy of a triumph of our own over that terrible Death.

Could Death not *hold* Him; was that *impossible,* because He proved to be stronger than Death, well, then Death may be able to take us away as spoil, but as spoil he shall not be able to *hold us,* if Jesus does not will and permit it.

Then His resurrection implies, that as soon as He speaks a word and commands Death to let go of his prey, after he has hold of us, Death shall *not be able* to resist, but shall have to obey, and the Jesus

Who made Himself free, shall also make us free, and deliver us from the power of Death.

The *power* is here at stake. Is Death stronger than Jesus, then there is no hope for us. But now that Jesus is proved to be stronger than Death, there is no hope for Death, that he shall be able to hold us in his bands.

When Jesus speaks he shall have to let go. He can still take hold of you, and take you away from this earthly life, but he can no more rule over you.

Yea, even when once you go into Death, and perchance years or centuries shall pass away, before Immanuel returns upon the clouds, and order Death and grave to return His treasures unto Him, yet in that meantime Death shall not be able to exercise power or dominion over you; Immanuel shall all that time be merciful to your soul; and in your dying say to you, what He said to the murderer on the cross: "This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise."

Yea, the glory of our Easter climbs higher still.

It does not only imply, that Death could not *hold* Jesus, and that once He shall not be able *to hold* those who are in Christ, but the glorious prophecy is also given us, that once *Death himself* shall be brought to nought.

He will truly be the enemy, that will hold out longest. When all other enemies shall have been slain, Death shall ever yet be the last remaining enemy to keep standing. But yet his hour too surely comes. *The last enemy that shall be overcome is Death.*

And herein alone is our triumph over Death completely triumphed!

It is not enough that he proved unable *to hold* Jesus, and that once he shall not be able *to hold*

those who are in Christ, but this too must be taken away, that as a constant living enemy he shall continuously make us afraid and fill us with fear and dread of his terrible power.

And therefore rest, blessed, God-devoted rest can only come to us when we see Death himself broken down, when Death himself is slain; yea, more still when we hear, that once Death himself shall devour death, and in the death of Christ be *destroyed*.

Only when we know, that it comes to this, jubilates everything that has breath, with the prophetic and apostolic word: "Death, where is thy sting, and grave, where is thy victory?"

It is no victory that only goes half way, but one that goes through to the end. And as often as dreadful Death takes another of our loved ones from our home, or menaces us ourselves, this is the inward rejoicing of our heart, which we put over against his cruelty and his menace, that we can say to him: "Once, O Death, comes your turn!"

One thing alone we do not grasp or understand. We mean this, that the whole world, that every child of man, that every mortal that once must die, does not fall down at Jesus' feet, does not offer that mighty Jesus homage and glory, and that even at Easter there are still thousands by thousands, who feel no impulse, no enthusiasm in themselves, to take the psalm of Resurrection in their lips.

If ever an epos has been sung, that can inspire and delight, it is indeed the glad story of Jesus' rising from the dead.

Death is mourned the world over. There is no human eye, from which Death has not forced tears of grief and sadness. No child of man lives, that shall once not sleep the sleep of Death. And see,

here is the eternal Vanquisher of Death, a triumphator such as mighty Rome has never known, and Who guarantees life from Death to all that will cling to Him,—and yet that poor world in its excitement and false hollowness keeps standing afar off, and when it hears God's children in holy inspiration sing the "Christ is risen", curls its lips with the sneer of unbelief, and turns back into its own somberness again.

That the children of God, from sheer pity for that somber, insunken world, might make their Easter psalm sound ever louder from land to land, from pole to pole!

Whatever be made dumb, that Song of Resurrection must never die away.

It is the song of hope for our human race.

But above all that God's children might show their real *faith* in this victory over Death and Grave.

Show it by putting away all fear of dying. Show it, in daily life, that they do not reckon merely with this short life that passes away, but far more with the eternal life that comes after. Show it yet more still, by radiating already here the glow and lustre of the new life, and by not letting the band hang loose, that binds them to the Prince of Life.

For this and nothing less, O, ye children of the Kingdom, you owe to Immanuel, Who arose, that your praise might be the escort of His triumph. You owe this to yourself, that your life be no longer from Death and for Death, but from the Resurrection of Christ and for the eternal Resurrection. You also owe this to the world that does not yet believe, and that from your faith must learn to know Immanuel, the Prince of Life.

VII

"MY LORD AND MY GOD."

HE exclamation of grateful worship: "My Lord and my God!" only went out from human lips to the Christ, after His resurrection. He was "the Son of the living God, and as such, He had been confessed more than once by the demon in the possessed, and at length by Peter, in the name of the disciples; but to fulness of conviction, so as to honor in God's Son *God Himself,* even up to Golgotha the best, the most intimate of His disciples had not yet come.

Under the moving power of His word, at the sight of His majestic deeds, or under the impression of His perplexing and yet so strongly attractive personality, undoubtedly more than once a feeling that they had to do with the Divine Being must have passed through their soul; but the disciples had not yet known, confessed, and with clear consciousness expressed in worship, the Deity of their Savior.

That acknowledgement *hid* under much that came across their lips, but that hiding *acknowledgement* had not yet become self-conscious *confession,* and above all from confession had not yet passed into the act of worship.

This is most clearly evident from the last conversations, that Jesus held with His eleven, in the upper room, before going to Gethsemane.

To the eleven God and Jesus ever yet were two. They still ask: Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us! And gently and reproachfully Jesus must answer: "Have I been so long time with you, and yet

hast thou not known me? He that hath seen *me hath* seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? (John 14: 9).

More painfully it could not have been told, what veil still hung between them and their Master.

But Jesus did not say: Worship me, for I myself am God. That worship had to rise spontaneously, in holy ecstacy, from the soul of His disciples.

It could not be learned from *without*, but from *within.*

And therefore it had to tarry until after Jesus' resurrection, when the sight of His glory added the last touch. And then it was not Peter, and not John, as we would have expected, but Thomas, whom the world calls a doubter, who first of all the children of men, confessed His Savior in His Deity, and worshiped Him as God.

In that kneeling down and in that worship by Thomas there lies an unusually strong witness for Christ's church; not for what Thomas did, but because Jesus did not rebuke nor refuse that worship of Thomas, but accepted it.

Of course, if our Lord were not to be worshiped as God, Thomas should have been rebuked.

He Who without being truly God, allows himself to be worshiped as God, is either demented and makes you tremble, or a crafty deceiver, who pretends to be God, and as God takes his seat in His temple.

The mark of the Antichrist.

Here is no midway.

Jesus, not refusing the worship of Thomas, but accepting it, wills likewise to be worshiped as God by you. If you withhold this, see to what a despicable personage you debase and degrade your Savior.

It is so absurd, with the Scripture in hand, to be

willing to pay Jesus high honor, but to dispute His right to the honor of being God.

For that which Thomas did, was nothing but express in words what is the life-breath of all Scripture.

Always the Eternal Word *become flesh.*

Immanuel, *God with us.*

God Who has dwelt among us *men.*

That His disciples came to this clarity of faith only *after* Jesus' resurrection, was truly owing to the hardness of their heart, provided that you do not deem herewith, that your heart would be less hard, because from childhood days you have confessed the Deity of your Savior.

Back of you there lie ages of worship. You found that worship ready, incorporated in the life of Christ's church. *Not* to worship Jesus as God you have been taught is a denial of His majesty.

But such was not the case with the disciples. They had to make their way through the thick mists of the dispensation of shadows, and this was well-nigh *impossible* before the resurrection.

Worship demands *certain distance*, and Jesus' association, those three long years with His disciples, had been so humanly common, so intimately personal, so free from social convention.

They had daily eaten and drunk with Him, often had they slept where He slept, on one purse had they lived with Him, every minor necessity of life they had spoken to Him about and shared.

And, of course, amid such circumstances the impulse to worship acts slowly.

But since then the breach was come.

They had fled, and Jesus had gone to Golgotha.

Between Him and them now lay the broad stream of the waters of death, and from the shore of death

He came back to them. Now at once *the distance* became evident. Now He had become *new* to them. Now He suddenly appeared to them in the glow of higher origin.

Now they *saw* it. Now they *handled* as with hands the Word of life.

So was He declared to be the Son of God with power by His resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1:4).

Hence that when they see Him again, as of itself they kneel down before Him, and that with Thomas, who was longest reluctant, it came at length to the blessed exclamation: "My Lord and my God!"

Before death at length all flesh succumbs. Patriarchs of old lived many centuries, yet in the end they descended into the grave. The strongest hero, who on the field of battle had defied death again and again, has yet at last become his prey. The drawing of the dance of Death sketches the highest reality of life. Whatever scoffers have scoffed, or have mocked the living God, not one of them, but at length has paid the to him so dreadful toll to death.

Death no man can overcome. Death he alone can overcome Who is Himself God.

Truly both Old and New Testaments make mention of quickenings of the dead. But, note, all those who have thus been quickened have again died. And also, they did not rise of themselves, there was always an Elijah or Jesus or Peter or Paul, who for a little while called them back to this fleeting life.

But here it is not so.

Jesus lives .... and dies no more. All power of death over Jesus is forever broken.

And again, at Jesus' grave there is no Elijah who bends himself over the dead body, and no Savior stands by, who calls: "Jesus, come forth!"

They are angels of God that descend, not to raise up Jesus, but as at His entrance at Bethlehem, so here to celebrate His return to life.

Jesus Himself stands up.

His is not the Passover of *quickening,* but the Passover of *resurrection.*

Immanuel *rises.*

And no one did this before Him, nor anyone after Him.

For we too shall once rise again, yes, if we are children of the Kingdom, in blessedness, but not as He, but *through* Him, in *His* power.

Thomas realized this, he *saw* it, and he believed and worshiped. Yea, truly, the marks of death were still in those hands, the spearwound in the side was still visible. It was no new, but the selfsame Jesus. The same Jesus Who had been tortured unto death on the accursed wood, and now in glory stood before him. The same Jesus Who was dead, and now lived.

And then Thomas succumbed, and of himself bent his knee, and his lips stammered the: "My Lord and my God!"

That sight is not our privilege, all those who come after the apostles, must rest in their witness.

This is and remains the fundamental difference between them and us.

They have seen with their eyes, and with their ears have heard, and with their hands have handled the Word of life, and our eyes see nothing, our ears can not overhear Jesus' voice, Him Who is exalted, our hands do not handle.

Ours remained only this *witness* of those who saw and heard.

And on this *witness* can you yourself believe, kneel down and worship?

Without this witness surely not, but also *on* this witness *without more* no one has ever confessed the Deity of his Savior.

If you personally have felt the "My Lord and my God" rise from your own soul, then it came truly, from the apostolic witness, but only *through the Comforter.*

Through that Holy Spirit, Who inwardly made you feel death, death in your sins, death in your misdeeds, and Who after that drew you out from that death and granted you the blessed apperception of life.

And he who, on this ground was permitted to confess: "I know that I have passed from death unto life," who does not repeat this after others, but declares this from his own soul, yea, he knows, he realizes what resurrection is. He acknowledges in his own resurrection unto life a fruit of Jesus' resurrection. He has the seal of the Spirit upon the apostolic witness. To him Immanuel is alive from the Word. And he sees, and hears and handles, not with the sensual organ, but with the organ of the spirit, a blessed reality, which at last brings him to his knees, makes him kindle into worship, and compels him to exclaim: My Goel, my Savior, my Lord and my God!

VIII

"BLESSED ARE THEY THAT HAVE NOT SEEN AND YET HAVE BELIEVED."

OUBTING Thomas" has been looked down upon age after age by many a superficial keeper of Easter who had reason himself rather to complain of the *unbelief of his* own heart. Thomas was by no means one hardened of heart, who fell short of faith. See how at length in holy ecstacy he falls down upon his knees, and worships his Savior as his Lord and his God.

If presently Thomas had not appeared as a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, how could Jesus have allowed him a place among the twelve of His holy apostolate.

Neither is it true, that the other apostles have not looked upon the marks of the nails and spear, and Thomas alone did.

John 20:20 clearly states, that the other apostles as well, by seeing the marks, were filled with great joy.

For thus we literally read: "And Jesus saith unto them, Peace be unto you, and when He had so said, he showed unto them his *hands* and his *side*, then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord."

So the difference lay not in this. Yea, to look upon the spear and nail wounds was so little wrong, that Jesus Himself, as you see, at their first meeting of His *own accord* pointed to them.

For Thomas however *seeing* was not enough; he

also wanted to *touch.* "Except," said he, "I shall put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe."

And in that urge, not merely *to see,* but also *to touch,* there was nothing sinful by itself. John too enthusiastically exclaimed: "What we have *seen* with our eyes, and our hands have *handled* of the Word of life, that declare we unto you." (1 John 1:3.)

Neither did Jesus make any remark about it. Jesus made even no mention of it. He did not say to Thomas: "Because you have *handled,* you have believed;" but: "Because you have *seen,* you have believed."

Jesus rather Himself came to Thomas' aid in that handling, and when He appeared a second time to His disciples, of His own volition He invited Thomas, to let finger and hand reinforce the look of the eye.

No, all Jesus' rebuke is concentrated in one point.

Thomas should have believed, that Jesus was risen, at *the saying of his fellow-apostles,* and that he refused to do so, and would only be convinced by his own observation, therein and therein alone lay his weakness.

What was there wrong in this?

But do you believe, that your Savior ever forgot His church, that was to come, the church of the future, which presently would confess Him?

And is it not evident then, that Thomas' refusal, to believe on *hearsay,* threatened to become a stone of stumbling to those confessors of Christ who were to come after?

Presently our Lord was to ascend into heaven.

Then He would no longer be on earth. Then no single one of His redeemed here on earth would be able to know Him *after the flesh.*

And if, by Thomas' refusal, those later confessors would allow themselves to be tempted and enticed, not to believe, before they had seen and handled, would not the faith on Jesus' resurrection be lost?

Not for the sake of Thomas therefore, who now truly did believe in His resurrection, and worshiped Him as his Lord and his God, but with an eye to the church of the future, with an eye to those later confessors, who would not be able to believe otherwise than on hearsay and not otherwise than on the witness of the apostles, the danger that threatened in Thomas' refusal, had at once to be nipped in the bud.

It had to be watched against, that the example of Thomas should not be contagious.

And therefore Jesus addresses him so sharply, saying: "*You* have now believed in my resurrection, because you have seen the marks in my flesh; but presently let my whole church know, that seeing of those marks is *not* indispensible, that presently my redeemed may believe in my resurrection, *without* having seen these marks and having handled them; and let my word go out, throughout all the world, that in believing without seeing, in that faith on apostolic witness, there is, no less, but rather a higher blessedness."

"Blessed are they, that have not seen, and yet have believed." (St. John 20:29.)

The rebuke directed to Thomas, should meantime be brought back within its just limitations.

From his nature and by reason of his office as apostle, he was not called to believe without seeing.

The other apostles have not done so either.

On the contrary, the peculiar position of an apostle brought with it, that he himself should see,

in order that he might be able to bring the witness to others, of what he had seen.

If the apostles had built their faith on suppositions, or on hearsay, we should have *missed* their apostolic witness regarding Jesus' resurrection.

Therefore Jesus has been on guard, that this should *not* so happen, and He Himself has given them the tangible proofs of His oneselfness with the crucified on Golgotha, by showing them the prints of His wounds in hands and side.

Considered from this side, Thomas' doubt has even become profitable to the church, insofar as too great a readiness on the part of the apostles to believe at first sight, might readily give rise to doubt about the accuracy of their observation.

Since, instead of being a man who was easily led to believe, Thomas was a man who was not readily persuaded, and would not even be content until he had *handled* the prints, the entire trustworthiness of the apostolic observation is thereby greatly strengthened.

There was only this shadowside to his attitude, that, by accidentally being absent the first time, he heard the witness of ten apostles, and rejected *that witness* as insufficient.

Presently he would himself go out into the world, to demand that the redeemed should believe in Jesus' resurrection on *his* apostolic witness; and in connection with this how could it be possible for him to refuse to yield before the witness of ten apostles?

This therefore had to be gently rebuked in him, that the glorious truth, "that faith comes by hearing and hearing by preaching," (Rom. 10:17) should suffer no loss.

And therefore Jesus said so positively and so significantly: "Faith on my resurrection shall hence-

forth not depend on seeing, but on acceptance of the apostolic witness."

"Blessed are they, that have not seen, and yet have believed."

For this, with imperturbable assurance, you should hold fast *to the Holy Scripture.*

For Jesus' claim, that since He went to heaven, you should believe in His resurrection, without seeing Him after the flesh, purely on the witness of the apostles, includes of itself, that you must have this witness before you, that you must have it in possession, that you may believe it. And where else do you find this witness except in Holy Scripture?

At present this is taught differently, but upon that different teaching follows irrevocably the punishment, that it becomes faith in Jesus' spiritual resurrection, and presently vanishes.

It is said: "It is the Spirit Who declared, that in the hiddenness of the heart, fellowship is practiced with the risen Savior. That He had to rise, was self-evident. He could not be holden of death. And so apart from apostolic witness and outside of Scripture, it was known that Jesus must have risen." Yea, they were not wanting, who gloried in believing apart from seeing, and rested only on the internal address of the Spirit.

This much was true in it, that real faith can not remain standing at the fact of the opened grave, but with Paul seeks to enter into the rich full significance of the Resurrection, and counts all things loss, yea, dung, to come to the spiritual knowledge of Jesus and of the power of His resurrection.

But *the fact itself* of Jesus' rising must first have taken place, must have been *seen,* and on the witness of those who *saw* it, be certain.

See, how the same Paul, who highly exalts the spiritual significance of Jesus' resurrection, nevertheless in 1 Cor. 15, puts *the facts* in the foreground first, and from those *facts* proceeds: "That he was seen of Cephas; after that of the twelve; then of five hundred brethren at once; then of James; then of all the apostles; and last of all of himself."

So speaks and writes the spiritual Paul, and thereby condemns all over-spirituality, that neglects the appearances and does not count the facts.

Pitiful results show, that where it began with being so overspiritual, it generally ended in utter unbelief.

The Spirit can not save you, except your starting-point lies anchored *in the Word.*

Strive therefore against your own heart, among the members of your own family, and in your circle, to make sure the faith on the Scripture.

He who weakens Scripture, wrests therewith the foundations of higher life. And they, who with the high pretence of their sense of truth, tear out one page after the other from the Word, shall bear the judgment before God, that with millions upon millions they have undermined the foundation of the faith and of the moral life.

On witness things must be believed. That is human. So it goes with the judge, so it goes before the tribunal of history, so it goes with education, so it goes in all matters of trust. And so it must proceed in the matter of faith.

Not every one, head for head, is able, on his own ground and for himself to investigate the facts.

Were this the case, Jesus would have to appear in the flesh to every one, head for head, and declare the Gospel to each individual severally.

But this is not His holy plan.

He appeared *once,* not only in behalf of those who then saw Him, but in behalf of all. And His will, His plan, His holy ordinance is, that what has happened once, should be delivered unto us, should be declared unto us, and that we, *not seeing,* but *hearing* that witness, should believe on that witness.

Hold fast therefore to your Easter-Gospel.

Attach value and significance to every one of Jesus' appearances.

And then, be not unbelieving, but believing, because the holy apostles have declared it unto you.

IX

"SEEK THEN THOSE THINGS THAT ARE ABOVE."

ASTER is a feast of new life. It comes up indeed from death, for "our Passover is *sacrificed* for us", but, that passing of the Lamb of God through death, is itself the victory over death, and directed to the bringing out of an eternal, indestructible *life.*

The working of the mighty power of God, which He wrought in Christ, is evident in his Incarnation, before the eye of faith glistens on Golgotha, but, it exhibited itself in its full majesty only, "when He raised Christ from the dead, and set him at His own right hand in heavenly places" (Eph. 1:19, 20).

That our Passover is *sacrificed,* points directly to the Passover of Resurrection, the church of Christ expressed significantly, by celebrating her holy communion *not* on *Good Friday,* but at Easter.

Christians who had strayed from the true understanding already in earliest times wanted this otherwise. Our holy communion, they said, should be a memorial of Jesus' dying on the day of His death.

But the apostolate did not tolerate this. You can only memorialize Jesus' death, when the fruit of that death is brought out *in life.* And he alone, who hails in that dying the sorrows, the travailings of the birth of life, can renew for himself the dying on Golgotha in grateful, be it pensive, joy.

And therefore Christ's church has these long centuries celebrated her holy communion, not on *Good Friday* that she might weep at the Cross, but

on Passover morning, that she might glory in what Golgotha brought us.

Not Easter apart from Golgotha, but also Golgotha never viewed otherwise than in the light of the Resurrection.

So only does not merely Jesus' dying, but also *His Resurrection* obtain a *spiritual* significance for us, and the memorial of His *rising* becomes a power that goes out from Jesus' church, to elevate spiritual life.

For it can not be denied, that all too frequently, as far as we are concerned, Jesus' resurrection is far too exclusively associated with our own resurrection.

This took place for many years in the superficial sense, that at Easter above everything else "the hope of immortality" was sounded. Since, after having died, Jesus appeared still to be alive, it was certain, that for us also after death a second existence disclosed itself.

So the preachers proclaimed it, and so it resounded in the echo of the congregation.

Yet this superficial trifling could not last, and thoughtful reading of 1 Cor. 15 blew this cardhouse over. For the holy apostle had said the very opposite. He did not *write*: "If Christ is not raised, then the dead are not raised"; on the contrary he wrote: "If the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised."

And of course, for he who wanders about in the valley of the shadow of death *without* "the hope of immortality", laughs with unholy scorn at everything that the evangelists and apostles tell us of Jesus' Resurrection.

So Easter preaching gradually improved. That "hope of immortality" was ended. And it was correctly understood, that it is not "a life after this

life", but definitely *the resurrection of the flesh,* that is sealed in Jesus' resurrection.

Yet this should not be too onesidedly emphasized.

Far more indeed than to the prophecy regarding *our body,* does Scripture point you to the fruit of your Easter for *the soul.*

"That we should be quickened with Him unto a new life," as has been ably said; or if you will as Paul wrote to the church at Colosse, "If then Christ be risen, *we should seek those things that are above,"* and that therefore before all things else Easter has a *spiritual* significance, and brings us a *spiritual* message,—that is what time and again Scripture binds upon the heart, since the tendency to forget it is so strong.

Easter speaks to us of the raising of Jesus' *body.* That He *continued to live* even though He died, was certain independently of His resurrection. No single disciple after Golgotha has doubted that.

Not His soul, but *His body* on the third day came back to life.

Hence that in His resurrection the *physical* appears so overwhelmingly in the foreground, and that because of this the temptation is so strong for the sake of that *physical* aspect of His resurrection, to minimize its *spiritual* significance.

Moreover it is so much easier to think of your own bodily resurrection, than of your *spiritual* rising again. The first goes on outside of your conscience. It carries your thoughts into a far future, when once the youngest day shall dawn. In this you are entirely passive.

But when there is mention of a *spiritual* rising again, it touches you personally, it touches the life *of your soul,* your conscience awakes, you can not remain passive, but action must follow, and, then

your thoughts do not project themselves into a far future, but it must come to a lifting up of your spiritual life, now, in the present moment.

Then it is not: "If Christ is raised, you may ponder on the resurrection of your flesh, "but altogether different, and far more striking: "If then Christ is raised, *seek those things that are above,* where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God."

The children of the world, and also, they who are still like children in the church, do not understand this; but they that are converted unto life understand this well.

For in their conversion they have passed over from the *body to the soul.*

Before their conversion, the body and the cares for the body stood in the foreground, with everything that belongs to it. All their thoughts and deliberations directed themselves to it, how to feed the body, how to satisfy its needs, how to yield to the body's desire for sleep, to clothe the body, to add to the attractiveness of its appearance, to have money to spend on it, and by their outward appearance to command influence in the world.

But after their conversion all this was changed. From that hour on the body was placed in the background and the soul came to the fore.

Thus far they had cared for the body in a masterful way, but their soul had been left to starve, to pine away for thirst, to become barren and lean, to become diseased by all sorts of inward poison.

They had simply neglected their soul, had not looked after it, had not cared for it.

That soul was to them as a nightingale in the woods, a bird whose charming song they sometimes overheard, but which must not cost anything and for

whose care they would not lift a finger. For hens, that lay eggs, they would spend pains and money, but that nightingale within was left to its own devices of obtaining food from God.

But now this has become different.

Now, after having been converted to the living God, they still provide for the needs of the body, for that is their duty, but the care for their soul keeps them continually more busy. First because, where strife arises, the body must give way to the soul, and never again, as before, may the soul be put second to the body. And again, because the soul which on account of the body had long been neglected, is now justified to demand a double measure of care, to make up for past neglect.

And this accounts for the fact, that a converted child of God with every incident, that is told him of Christ, asks indeed what the significance of it all is for his body, for the body too is God's, but that in the first and foremost place he lends his ear, to hear, what those things that pertain to Jesus, have to say and what benefit they provide, for his so long undervalued, inwardly impoverished and neglected *soul.*

An Easter preaching which does not aim at *this* mark, and does not hit it, does not refresh the faithful.

It does not meet the want of the converted heart.

It is not after the spirit of childship, that cries: *Abba Father!*

But what refreshes and comforts, is the apostles' word: "that Christ is raised *for your justification.*"

A sound without flavor or taste, to him who has to ask others, what justification is. But a sound full of sweetness and delight to him, who knows and mourns a guilt that consumes his hope, and who

every time again when he lifts up his soul unto God, cries that that guilt might be turned away, that that guilt might be atoned for, that that guilt might be cast into the depths of the sea, and thus thirsts after justification.

He who breathlessly thirsts after water, knows water and knows well what water is. And so here, he who thirsts that he might be justified before God, knows the nature of justice, and understands what *justification* is.

And this justification is pledged and sealed in Jesus' resurrection. For were He *not* risen, He would not have been *the Son of God.* Then He would have died for our sins as a martyr, and not as the Lamb of God. Then Golgotha would have brought us no result, and we would still be in our sins.

But now that Jesus is risen, and thereby has been shown with power to be the Son of God, now faith glories: "He Who there died upon the accursed wood was the Son of God, Himself God and with God". And now the grace-seeking soul understands, that the dying of the Son of God was not for Himself but for us, an offering of infinite value and sufficient to atone for the sins of the whole world.

But there is more.

Not only does Jesus' resurrection seal unto you, that in Golgotha lies the absolute antidote, that directly renders the poison, the deadly poison of guilt and of sin, nugatory in its working and destroys it, and therefore presents you just before God; but also in Jesus' resurrection the mighty fact expresses itself, *that the body follows the soul,* and not the soul the body.

Because in dying, up to the moment when He gave up the ghost, Jesus after the soul gloriously

overcame, therefore also His body could not be holden of death.

In the bitter conflict between soul and body, Jesus sacrificed His bodily life, His bodily existence. And just because the soul dominated over the body, it is from out the soul that life returns again to His body.

And this reacts directly upon our own life's struggle.

To us also this life-struggle presents itself again and again under this same form.

On one side there is that which the body asks, and the body demands, and the body wills; but also on the other side the demand of the soul, that the body shall serve her, sacrifice itself for her, shall not be unto her an opponent, but an helpmeet.

True, all the struggle of life does not consist of this. But when by the sphere of the body you understand and comprise everything that from the visible and the external entices and would tempt you, and put over against this the need and the claim of the soul, then in nine cases out of ten, your life-struggle comes down to this, and your spiritual decline, your lack of spiritual animation and exaltation, yea, even the sobriety in your tone of life is attributable to an abandonment of the soul and a yielding to the body.

And therefore in all ages there has gone forth from Jesus' resurrection unto all those that are known of the Lord a special call to *spiritual* revival.

Because Christ is risen, seek those things that are above.

For what is your Easter, what is Jesus' resurrection, but the perfect triumph of spiritual life over the life of the flesh, the seal of God upon the rule, that when the soul abandons the body, the soul obtains power, gloriously to regain also that body again.

You see, you view it in the rising of Immanuel, how the spiritual life bears rule superpowerfully over the life of the body. Neither in Gethsemane nor on Golgotha did the spirit in Jesus shrink back before any demand whatever of the body. In all His suffering and dying you see Him moment by moment abandon the body, sacrifice it, make it serviceable to higher aim. And here at the open grave, you see, how the spirit of Jesus could bring that offering, and that He was obliged to bring that offering, because thereby alone could He reveal that higher power, first indeed to lay down life, but afterward also to take it up again.

This commandment He had received of His Father.

And now the conflict was ended.

The body glorious, because subjected to the soul, and in that glory of the body, evident, not the defeat, but the triumph of the spiritual life.

Hence you are a child of the Resurrection only, when that power that was aglow in Jesus' resurrection, and at the opened grave shines forth upon all believers, is communicated to your soul, and in the life of your soul has so established the relation between soul and body, as it was sealed in Jesus' resurrection.

A child of the Resurrection is himself *spiritually quickened.*

Not merely begotten again unto life in the mystery of regeneration, but also *quickened* in the spiritual tone of life, and *quickened* in the spiritual lifting up of soul.

Quickened not in the sense of *over-exertion* or spiritual *excitement*, or spiritual *over-stimulation.*

That over-exertion, that excitement and that

over-stimulation comes to unstable souls from the foaming cup of spiritual emotionalism, not from the opened grave of your Savior.

But although all such excitement, over-exertion and over-stimulation, which is so diametrically opposed to that sobriety of spirit that governs the real children of God, must everytime be warned against, yet this should never be made an excuse, to seek the things that are on earth, and to forget those things that are above.

Continual awakening therefore among God's people is most necessary. The "awake, thou that sleepest, and let Christ give thee light" (Eph. 5:14) should every morning be proclaimed from the pinnacle of the temple as a call for revival of spiritual life.

Where the atmosphere so often becomes sultry and oppressive, and renders spiritual breathing difficult and faint, the fresh wind of morning should blow everytime again through the garden of the Lord, that the fading flowerbud may lift itself up again on its stem.

Spiritual *warming* against the chill of the spiritual atmosphere, spiritual *animation* against the deadening influences of ordinary life, spiritual *awakening* against the spirit of sleep, that so easily overtakes the soul, and spiritual *uplifting* to safeguard us against so much that draws us on to the depths, is our common need, and woe to him, who instead of waking the brethren up to this again, extinguishes in them the spark of this sacred fire.

For if there is one speech that goes forth from the opened grave of Jesus, it is this: that after soul and body both you show your nobility only, when the soul may royally bear rule in you over the body, to sacrifice, where needful, the things of the body,

and through that sacrifice to exalt not merely the soul, but *also the body,* to higher levels.

Dominion of soul over body, of the spirit over the flesh, of the invisible over that which is before our eyes, not for the sake of deeming in over-spirituality that the things before our eyes are valueless, but on the contrary, that in the power of God the glow of your higher spiritual life may radiate upon the whole of your outward life.

Celebrate the sense and the passion, that from the bodily sphere entices and tempts you, and the end is that both soul and body perish and go into perdition. But also, see it in Jesus, when you give the soul free rein to bear entire rule over the body, if needs be unto death, the soul overcomes royally and shares her wondrous triumph with the body.

Flesh and *spirit,* that and no other is the all-dominating antithesis, which in your Easter addresses you.

Here the spiritual art of the balance is at stake, and woe be unto you, when the scale, in which spiritual fruit is weighed, is found wanting.

Almost all spiritual heaviness, dulness and deathliness, proceeds from yielding to the body, from a fostering of the flesh, from not regularly feeding and watering, clothing and adorning the soul.

Always a broken equillibrium, so that the care for the flesh is *too great,* and anxiety for the daily care of the soul *far too small.*

And against this every year, as Easter returns, yea, each Lord's day, when the hours of sacred rest start in again, the resurrection of Immanuel enters protest.

He your Savior has shown you in His dying and in His rising again, that the way to perfect glory is

not the yielding to the demands of the flesh, but the fixed dominion of the spirit over the flesh.

And therefore your *spiritual increase,* O, children of revelation, is not, that in over-exertion or excitement you get away from yourself, but herein unlocks itself the gate through which you enter into the higher, more tender, more vital spiritual life, when, looking at the deliverance of Immanuel and His resurrection, you take the reins out of the hands of the body, of the flesh, of what is before your eyes, and, knowing the power of Jesus' resurrection, you *subject* everything that is of the senses to the dominion of the spirit that is within you.

III.

ASCENSION

I

"GOD IS GONE UP WITH A SHOUT."

OD can not *ascend*, unless He has first *descended*. This is different with us. We are here below. Our origin lies in the dust of the earth. Hence our whole calling in life is, to climb from the lowestmost parts of the earth up to the highest heavens. That is our pilgrim journey. Therein beckons our holy destiny.

But this is not so with the Lord our God. For the heavens are His throne. High in the heavens above is the trystingplace of His holiness. And in this lower sphere, in these lowestmost parts of the universe, His majesty can never become evident, except as God has *bent Himself down*, in compassion has *turned* Himself toward us, has visited us from on high, and has come down to us *on this earth*.

And this is not all.

For although in forbearance God does bend Himself down to us, this earth can never become His dwellingplace. His august palace is *above*, and as often as God the Lord has come down to us on this earth, an *ascent* has always been bound to follow after this descent. God in His majesty *always* goes back to the heaven, where He was before.

You learn this from Psalm 68, which celebrates in song, that Israel's God, Who had come down to His people, and in a tent had journeyed with His people through the wilderness, now went up to Zion's hilltop, as image and shadow of His august palace in the heavens.

You learn this from Psalm 47, when in Jehosha-

phat's days the peoples round about made it hard for His Israel; and the army of the priests, and the battle-ranks of Israel had gone into the fight; and the Lord had gone out with them; and before Jehovah, had driven forth every enemy of Israel from before His face. For then also at Israel's return from the field of battle, Israel's God turned back with them to Zion; and now once more *He goes up in His holiness* to His holy house, to the place which He had chosen for Himself; and again priest and levite and all in Israel who fear the Lord rejoice and sing: "God is gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet."

And yet, in David's and in Jehoshaphat's days all this was only preparation and forecast of that one altogether unique ascent of God into the heights, that presently would take place from the mount of Olives at the *ascension of Jesus.*

For the real enemies of God, and the enemies of His people, are not Ammon and the Philistines, but the powers of darkness, of *sin,* death and hell, which estrange this earth from God, and, had not God prevented it, would hopelessly have destroyed it.

And, therefore, all that battling of Jehovah in behalf of His people Israel, was truly prelude and preparation and indication of what was to come, but it was not the real battle.

No, it only came to that real, that decisive, that truly redemptive conflict, when Mary had brought forth her first born Son; and God in Christ came down to destroy the works of the Devil; and Jesus on the cross brought about the reconciliation; and in His resurrection from the dead the power of *sin, death and hell* was destroyed.

Only then the purpose of God's ways become evident. Only then was the real power that is inimical

toward God pierced in the main artery of the heart. Only then was God come down to deliver His chosen people from the power of this age and of wickedness in the air.

But therefore it could only then come to the *real* Ascension.

A glorious King, our God, Who had gone out from the palace of His glory, and had come down to this sinful earth, to wage war against His enemies, Satan, Death and Hell; and Who now, after having triumphed completely over these powers of darkness, in great splendor returned to His august palace, and therefore ascended into heaven.

Only so do you understand what that ascension of Jesus was.

It was by no means a mere going away again on the part of Jesus, because He could not remain here. Neither was it simply a return of Jesus to heaven, because heaven was His home where He belonged. No, it was the *triumphant procession of a King,* Who, after having overcome all His enemies to the death, and after having trodden to the end the winepress alone, now comes from Bozrah, with sprinkled garments from Edom, and as conquering head of His army, laden with glorious spoils, ascends in glory to the throne of His majesty.

For this the psalmist sings: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in" (Psalm 24). And to the question: "Who is this King of glory?" all the hosts, that go up with Him, exultingly reply: "The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle!" And when it is asked again: "Who is this King of

glory?" the deafening refrain is once more sounded: "The Lord of hosts, he is the king of glory! Selah!"

Thus Jesus' ascension tells you, that the struggle is now ended. That now at last the decisive battle has been fought. That in this decisive battle *your King* was conqueror to the end. And that He, your Head and King, laden with rich, spiritual booty, now made His entry into heaven, thitherward to call and to draw unto Himself all His faithful, and to enrich them with the wealth of His salvation.

That ascension is the crown upon the battle that has been fought.

No more the struggle, the bitter fight itself. That lies *back* of the ascension. That has been ended in His rising from the dead.

But now the triumph, now the triumphal entry, now the proclamation of victory throughout all the heavens, that Satan is vanquished and Messiah has triumphed for ever and for aye.

If you take it otherwise, Jesus' ascension is dull and colorless, and without joy for your own soul.

But if you understand that ascension as the Scripture pictures it to you, the ascension of Christ is for you the beginning of glory, as well as regards what lies back of you, as with respect to the future which you face.

For what lies back of you.

For so only is Jesus' ascension a glorious event to you, by which your Mediator solemnly declares to heaven and earth that the power of Satan is vanquished; that atonement for sin has been made; that righteousness is established; and that death has forever been robbed of his might.

But also for your future.

For Jesus' ascension declares unto you that this battle shall never be resumed, that it is impossible for Satan and Death ever to get the upper hand again; and that, thanks to the glory to which Immanuel arose, your salvation is forever sure.

True, there is an aftermath to this battle; the marks of the Christ must still be borne by them that are His; and the cross remains the symbol of your life, as long as you still remain on the battlefield or in your tent.

But that time at most is short.

Each in turn is called by your King to the palace of His honor. And then you may leave this battlefield, and from your tent pass over into God's eternal dwellingplace, and with your triumphant King forever enjoy His glory.

Yea, more still.

Even though you must still remain behind on the field of battle, to pursue the beaten foe, and at the frontier stand at your post as watchman, and cause balm to flow into the wounds of such as are wounded, and to collect the scattered weapons, and to gather together the booty that remained behind, yet all this you do already now *without danger of your life.*

For your King from heaven keeps watch over you.

His Name and Power reach to the heart of your enemies. And *who* dares longer seriously to resist the banner of your King?

And when resistance does arise, and Satan tries to move again, he is as the tiger on a chain, that can make a leap and open his maw, but is held by Christ in leash, and in all his attempts is time and again beaten back by power from on high.

Hence all that now matters is: that you *believe* that your Savior has conquered; *believe* that the vic-

tory of your Savior was for ever decisive; that you *believe:* "Now is my King in heaven and reigns in glory," and that therefore you look up to heaven; feel homesick in your soul after heaven; and in all your pilgrim journey know no other aim than to arrive in heaven and there be forever with your Savior.

II

"WHITHER THE FORERUNNER IS FOR US ENTERED."

ERSONAL fellowship with our Savior is a mystery, even as among us there is mystery in all fellowship with those who are no more on earth, or with those who on earth live far apart from us. So in our fellowship with our Savior there lacks that "seeing and hearing and handling of the Word of life" in which, at the beginning of his first epistle, St. John so greatly rejoices. It is now, as Paul says, a knowing of Christ "no longer after the flesh". It is indeed sacred intercourse with the Mediator, but in *hidden* fellowship. A life with Him in the representation; in deepest aperception of soul; in the consciousness of our self-perception, which is not understood.

That experience of Jesus' nearness, or of your soul's approach to Him, is quickened in very different ways, mostly so that you can give no account of it.

At one time reading and meditating on the Word will make you feel, you know not how, as though your Savior were close by you. So in prayer this sacred hiddenness will take hold of you. At another time it will be to you in the gathering of the faithful as though the love of Christ were consuming your soul. At still another time it will be to you in the fellowship with saints as though you came close by your Savior. There are those who experience the richness of this enjoyment in solitude rather than elsewhere. Yea, even in a dream that sacred presence can stand before us, and His word be overheard by us.

Even this does not exhaust the manysided form of this holy fellowship. For while all these experiences of soul tend more or less to enjoy such blessed fellowship *in the representation,* there is also a spiritual fellowship with the Mediator when He comes and makes His abode with us, or as the Vine causes His vital power to operate in the branches, or as it becomes with the child of God: *"No longer I live, but Christ lives in me."*

For then there is no fellowship through representation, but fellowship with your Savior in the root of the higher life.

The becoming aware that you are one planting with Him. Feeling the drawing of the conjunctions that bind you as member to the body of Christ. Feeling the throb within you of the life-blood that courses through the whole body of the Lord.

But, however broad and many-sided that fellowship-life with the Savior may be, His *ascension into heaven* intends still something else.

When He ascends into heaven, He goes away from you.

Thus His ascension by itself is no granting, but *breaking* of fellowship. No approach toward you; but separation from you.

That ascension into heaven, not in fantasy, but *in reality,* actually puts between Jesus and us an immeasurable distance; it is a robbing of His personal fellowship; a separation which gives rise to the feeling of sadness, and which already for centuries finds its naïve echo in the childlike moan: *"O, if Jesus were yet on earth!"*

True, God's child does not say this. They who have become spiritually-minded know that this separation had to come. That it could not be obviated. That it

has abundantly been made good to us. And that, when the drama of this dispensation shall be ended, it shall bear still so much richer fruit. Even so, the sad side of that separation must needs be considered.

The angels truly comforted the apostles, saying: "Why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). But for all that the apostles have felt it, have lived through it, have given an account of it, that from now on they would *miss* what had been allowed them thus far, be it that they received in exchange, O, so much, of what thus far they had been deprived.

And it must still be confessed: "If the choice were ours, to have Jesus back, as the apostles had Him with them in their boat on Genesareth's sea, and lack what we now possess; or to keep what we now have, while missing fellowship with Him after the flesh", the naïve child might wish that Jesus were still on earth, but he who knows Him spiritually would not accept the exchange.

But herein lurked a danger. The danger that we would so represent the matter to ourselves, as though from the nature of the case it had to be either the one or the other, and that we do not perceive in ourselves that mighty working of the faith, which says: "No, what my soul desires and my deepest longing for delight calls for is, no exchange, no choice, *but the possession of both.*"

Not Jesus only as at Sichar He met the Samaritan woman, and not merely a fellowship with my Mediator which, as at present, remains mystical only, but some time, in the hour appointed of God, that full,

that all-sufficing, that perfect fellowship, which then renders that mystic communion yet more abundant, and at the same time permits us to see His glory face to face.

So God's angels desired it, and so the apostles of the Lord set us the pace.

Now suffer the loss of Jesus' bodily presence, but at once fix the eye upon the fact that once He shall return bodily.

Thus the angels.

And as a yea and amen to the apostolic supplication: *"Come, Lord Jesus, yea come quickly,"* and the apostolic note of jubilation: *"We shall see him as he is."*

Between these lies the dying.

When God's child has the longing to depart and to be with Christ. This, of course, indicates that in the middle state on which, after dying, we enter, and which shall only end with the resurrection of the flesh, a closer, a more intimate, another fellowship with Jesus shall be our portion than was possible here on earth.

But even this fellowship may not be the limit of our desires.

Not just after dying, but only after Jesus' return upon the clouds, does our hope find its consummation.

Then as it shall be: "A fellowship with the Mediator not after the spirit only, but also after the flesh; a fellowship with Him as face to face in the degree and state of glorification.

"Not with the Man of sorrows, but with the King of glory."

Therefore meditation on Jesus' ascension into heaven is so needful.

For so long as the soul is satisfied with *less*, than God has declared unto her in His promises, she puts her ideal too low, takes merely a part of God's promises *pro memorie*, and separates what God hath joined together.

One then satisfies himself with the spiritual, estimates that spiritual as the all in all; and has no deeper longing in his heart, that goes out beyond that spiritual.

And of course, then there comes something of a pining away in our faith.

For, when that spiritual is the all in all, and our ideal reaches no further, why then the *incarnation?* Did not a David and an Isaiah have spiritual fellowship?

Why then that going up and down the land, those three long years? Why then the *resurrection?* Why all that appearing in the flesh?

Then all this becomes merely a *going onward,* without an *entering into* the heavens.

And so it comes, that so many a child of God with the sponge of his spiritual onesidedness wipes out half of his world of faith.

Then he imagines Jesus to himself as a spirit. He does not count with the fact, that our Savior has borne into heaven, through the veil, our human nature, after soul and body both. And for himself he desires nothing more and nothing higher, than once to depart, and be with Jesus.

It is, as though correcting God in His counsel, he muses within himself: "O, if God but grant me the spiritual, He may keep that glory for Himself. The longing of my soul does not stretch out to this. Of all this I have no need."

And therefore the Scripture admonishes you every time again and so clearly, that you outline to yourself that ascension of Jesus into heaven as an actual departure from this earth, a real going upward, a passing through the heavens, and a going back of the veil, into the sanctuary.

Not as a *representation,* but because *it so is.*

That in lifting up your thoughts on high, you shall as it were see and know, that there your Savior now lives in our nature, and glorifies that nature.

That thus in heaven, seated at the right hand of God, He awaits and abides the hour, known only to the Father, when the fulness shall begin, and once more bodily He shall come back to this earth.

And that He is there, not for His own sake, but for ours, as our *forerunner.* He the firstling, that presently we should follow Him. Till we rise from our graves, and for us glory begins.

All that is man and partaker of human nature, calls in behalf of his existence, according to God's ordinance for three things: for a *soul* that is pure, for a *body* that is glorious, and for a *world* that is *free* from curse.

For Adam there was first that *world;* then from that world God created his *body;* and in that body He created the pure soul.

But with Jesus it is the other way.

He is conceived of the Holy Ghost, and so there is first the pure, spotless *soul,* while after the body He is to be the Man of sorrows, subject to the weaknesses of our fallen nature.

Then in the resurrection the dust separates itself from that body, and the pure soul obtains her glorious *body.*

And now it tarries, and waits for the third, that that glorious body shall also obtain back again its glorified world, and that comes with Jesus' return upon the clouds.

And this is to us the wondrousness, that now there is a Mediator, Who has fellowship with our nature in a pure soul and in a glorified body, the whiles the *world* is not yet renewed, and the glory has not yet broken through in it.

It is Jesus' body, wherein at present that glorious world rests as in embryo. Our life is hid with Christ in God.

But once that mystery also discloses itself.

And then shall be the consummation.

When the ascension shall have received its complement in the *regeneration* of the whole universe (Matt. 19:28).

Blessed is he, who shall enter into this glory!

III

"BY WHOM ALSO WE HAVE ACCESS."

UR impression of the glory and majesty of God is far too faint; otherwise our joy over the ascension of Jesus would be far greater, far more intense. It is to us all too frequently, as though the ascension of Jesus were little more than a necessary result of His resurrection; an aftermath of Easter-morn; the only conceivable means by which He could disappear from this earth.

And when we read that Enoch went away without dying, and Elijah went into heaven with fiery horses and chariots, it does not seem to us so wonderful and so striking, that Jesus went away from this world by ascension. He could no more die; neither could He remain on this earth; hence in order to go into heaven, He was bound to ascend thither.

Yet in this way the meaning and purpose of Jesus' ascension is altogether lost. It remains indeed a fact, which you believe, a final act of the drama which began with the incarnation and about which you are glad for Jesus' sake. But all this is a work of remembrance and of thoughts and does not touch your heart.

And this should not be so. The ascension too is a link in the work of redemption, and you can celebrate the ascension only, when you appreciate and enjoy the fruit of this part also of the work of salvation.

Already the Twelve articles of the faith set the pace for you, to accept the ascension of Jesus among

the mysteries of faith. Thus there lies in it not merely something for your *memory,* but also something for the *faith of your soul.* And it is that aroma of Jesus' going up into heaven in which you should exult on the feast of His ascension into heaven.

And what is this mystery?

It is this, that He ascended into heaven in order that by Him you should have *access.*

I well know, that in our more secular moments our soul does not cling to this. In days and hours of thoughtlessness we are reckless and insolent enough to imagine that there is nothing wrong in it, when we present our prayers directly to the Eternal Being ourselves; with our soul go straight to Him; and so force our presence and our fellowship upon the Lord God!

But such seeking of the Lord is nothing but useless effort. You kneel indeed on your knees, but you do not pray. You call, but your voice does not reach His ear. You seek Him, but your eye does not discover Him. And from fellowship with the Eternal Being your soul remains far distant.

Presently therefore you judge and condemn that bold recklessness; and in moments when the heart became tender, and you became sensible of your own condition, and the overwhelmed soul would pour out itself, there was nothing more of this unspiritual *daring;* then wilfulness forsook you; and bashfulness overtook you and shamedness of face.

And when you ask in which of these moments there was real piety in you, you can not hesitate, but realize at once, how thoughtless, hollow and empty that pseudo-piety was, wherewith you dared to call upon your God, and how on the contrary the timidity

and diffidence, the confusion and shame-facedness which afterward overtook you, brought you under a far more real impression of the majesty of your God.

And God's word says Amen to this, and seals that hesitancy, and addresses you in those moments of your confusion, by pointing you to Immanuel, your Surety and Brother, Who discloses to you the *access* and *approach* to the Eternal Being.

And this is the mystery of Jesus' ascension into heaven. He was here; as one of us; in our flesh and in our blood; and from here He ascends and goes into heaven, "there to appear before the face of God for us," that is to say, where angels cover their faces, and in our best moments we shrink back and have no more courage, He goes in *for us*, to pray *for us*, to carry our prayers on the censors, and so give to our soul a bold, and yet not over-bold access to fellowship with our God.

It is not, that Jesus lives to pray for us, as though we ourselves were not permitted to pray to the Father. On the contrary, the Lord Jesus Himself has said: "I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you, for the Father Himself loveth you." (John 14: 27). From your own soul to call on the Father He has taught us in the Our Father. True worshipers, worship the Father.

But here is the key to earnest prayers; you truly pray, but it only becomes true prayer from your soul to the Father Who is in heaven, when your prayer goes *through Jesus*, when in the prayer He is the Mediator, Who discloses the access to you again, and in Him you appear before the Father, and through Immanuel you have the approach of your prayers to the Throne.

When you hover upon yourself, when for one moment you do not live in Christ, when for one moment your soul stands outside of Him, then you are in yourself, in your own barrenness and lie in the midst of death; and it is impossible, that from that barrenness and from the midst of that death outside of and without your Mediator you should find a real soul quickening approach to the throne of grace.

Then everything beats back upon your own soul. There are words but there is no motion of soul. There are sounds, but there is no warmth. You do not get beyond the semblance, and the reality of the matter you lack.

But when faith flourishes; when it sparkles; and sparks spring out in you; so that you lay hold on Immanuel; and in Him your Avenger; and in that Goel you feel yourself slip away from you, so that in Him, and not in yourself you appear before the Eternal;—O, then at once the whole world of your prayers turns around, then there come breaches in that copper heaven, then it is as though the windows above are being opened unto you, and you perceive, you feel, you handle it, that your prayer became real exercise of fellowship, a crying of your soul on high, and an assurance, a blessed experience, that it is He Who has heard you.

If now this going in, in Christ, and this going through Christ to the Father were the product of *your* thought, *your* deed, *your* soul's transaction, of course the ascension would have nothing to say to you. But this is just what the Scripture teaches you otherwise. She teaches you, that it is not your soul that lays hold on Christ as your Guide, at Whose hand to go to God, but that it is your Lord on high

in heaven, your good Shepherd, *Who leads you to the Father.*

It is no act of yours therefore, whereby you use Jesus as a passive instrument, but Jesus the Person from Whom action goes out upon you, and gives, apportions and provides you with the access to the Father.

A Christ, a Mediator, an Advocate, Who still comes down every moment to His redeemed, to lift them out of their faintness, and with them ascends into heaven, to lead their souls in to the Father.

And therefore in dying there is nothing so sweet, as dwelling with the soul on Jesus' ascension into heaven.

Dying also is an "appearing before the presence of God." Not yet in the judgment. Not yet in the great illustrious day. But still an appearing "before the face of God," in a clearer and a deeper sense, than ever we did in our prayers here on earth.

Every one feels it, when it comes to dying: now all swathings and all veils fall away, *and God, God Himself, awaits me.*

And, O, it is then so poor and cold and desolate, when in its denuded state, the soul must go into eternity. It rouses deepest pity, to see, how, that they might appear before God, thousands upon thousands have no one to take them by the hand, to lead them through the valley of death, and escort them to the Eternal.

But glorious, rich, to make the eye beam with delight, is then the lot of Zion's children.

For there is One, Who then gives them this guidance; Who at once takes them by the hand; Who carries them through the valley of death; Who

clothes them with His righteousness; and under the whisperings of words of tenderest love, leads them into the august palace of their God.

With every death of one of the called it is always a descent of the faithful Shepherd to take their soul, and with it to ascend into heaven.

Blessed *access!*

Here in prayer. Presently in dying. And so shall we be ever with the Lord.

IV.

PENTECOST

I

"COMFORT YE, COMFORT YE MY PEOPLE."

HEN this world passes away, and the realm of glory shall come in, more than one beautiful thing will be gone for ever. There shall no more be known either the beauty of compassion and of mercy, or the beauty of sympathy and of comfort.

To comfort one is a beautiful thing; even in that which is less serious. A little girl, who dropped her doll, so that its head brake in two, and now sobs and cries, arouses simultaneously your smile and your pity; but something beautiful, something holy enters upon the scene of childlife, when presently you see how the little one in her despair by her mother is caressed and *comforted.*

And this beauty of comfort gains in value as the grief wounded the more deeply, and the comforting caress gives place to a comforting by the eye tender with pity and the reassuring word coming up deep from the soul.

So God comforted Adam, when trembling he fled from God, and the Lord called to him, saying: "Adam, where art thou?"

This is the first step in comforting, that one calls to himself him that is desolate in his grief, or as though called by his grief one goes himself to him.

Pain, sorrow, grief creates a sense of forsakenness, of loneliness, of being thrown back upon oneself; and therefore the first thing he who cries needs, is that there is someone who will take an interest in him, who will break his forsakenness, who will comfort

him, who will make him feel that he is not left as a prey to his grief. In bitter grief it is even good when one does not remain standing alongside or over against you, but gently puts his arm around your neck, draws you towards him, and makes your battle-worn head rest against his breast.

Therefore, in the language in which St. John wrote, the Comforter is called the Paraclete, that is he who has been *called in* to one in trouble; and to comfort in that language means: *to call one to you.*[1)]

As Ishmael lay in the wilderness, even without being able to speak, and it reads: "*God* heard the voice of the lad" (Gen. 21:17), so there goes out from every sorrow a voice that calls for pity, for sympathy, for compassion, and he who so allows himself to be called, because he understands the dumb language of distress, is *the Comforter.*

Hence the word of Isaiah 40: 1: "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, your God shall say. Speak ye comfortably to the heart of Jerusalem" (Dutch version).

This began already before the Flood. Lamech called the name of his son Noah, for, so he prophesied: "This same shall *comfort* us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed" (Gen. 5: 29).

That was so then, that is so now, and this shall be to the end the ever-welling spring of our grief. Sin, the curse, the misery of life. Misery all *about* us, and misery *in* our heart.

And this is the distressing part of it, that this grief becomes the more poignant as the sensitiveness of our feeling increases; increases after the measure of your

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1) To this the objection was raised, that it does not read *Paracletor*, but *Paracletus*. But this is not valid. Even without voice sorrow calls, and in that sense the comforter is always the one who is called in to help.

higher spiritual estate; and reaches its highest when you are of the people of God; yea, that this grief has never been felt more deeply and been suffered longer than by the Finisher of our faith.

Him comforted in Gethsemane not the disciples, but the angels of God.

And with Him His people suffer, and among that people the prophet more than ordinary believers, the witness more than he that remains standing afar off, the more deeply initiated more dreadfully than he who glides along the surface.

That is called Zion. "Zion" is that part of God's people that enters most deeply into the things of the Lord. And therefore says the prophet, that "God Himself shall comfort His Zion".

Children of the world have their trials and disappointments, but they get away from them, they allow themselves to be diverted. And above all, they do not have the stream of the world against them, but drift along with it. It seems at times as though prosperity is their portion. Already Asaph said (Psalm 73: 5), "They are not plagued like other men."

But day by day God's people drink from the cup of affliction, and in addition to this, with them it is always rowing against the stream, there is never an end to their struggles against the world, and they know sorrows of soul, to which the world remains foreign and then suffer for the sake of God and of the name of the Lord, as no child of the world can suffer.

And therefore there is always a voice of complaint crying out of Zion unto God for comforting, and in response the voice from heaven keeps calling: "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people."

God's people always suffer this sorrow. Zion suffers for the sake of Zion. There are evils abroad in

the church of God. There is opposition to the Name of the Lord. There is a falling away among the brethren. There is a feeling at times as though everything were giving way under our foot. Till even an outbreak of sin among the brethren comes to distress us. Brothers grieve us more deeply than the enemy can make us afraid.

And this is not thought of, and this does not concern him who is busy alone with himself.

But devout children of God, they who are Zion, feel it, O, so deeply, and theirs is a suffering as once the prophets endured.

And *that* suffering, that suffering of His Zion God knows, and therefore He continues to apportion comfort to His Zion.

"Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God!"

In a small circle, for a short time, there was superabounding comfort, which made sorrow to be forgotten.

My disciples, said Jesus Himself, do not fast so long as the Bridegroom is with them. They who could handle the Word of life, were past the sorrow of God's people. But, as Jesus additionally declared, when the Bridegroom shall have been taken away from them, the darkness in their soul shall be the more awful. Then would their heart be troubled.

But so it could not remain. Therefore said Jesus to them: "Let not your heart be troubled, I will send you *another Comforter.*" And then came God the Holy Ghost.

The deep thought in this is, that the comforting of men is too shallow, and the comforting of angels falls too short, and the real comforting of God's people

only comes *when God Himself comes to comfort His Zion.*

So He came *in the Son,* and comforted the disciples. And so He came now *in the Holy Ghost,* and comforted the church.

And when you ask whether in earlier days God Himself had not comforted His people, the answer runs: "O, surely, but as from afar and from on high, and *not close at hand.*

And this is the New Testament, that now the Comforter comforts no more *from afar,* but comes *to His people,* and *dwells* among them.

This was the rejoicing of the disciples when Jesus was with them: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

And this same is now the praise-psalm of God's people. The Holy Ghost has been poured out, has come close to us, and has chosen our heart to be His dwelling-place.

Say to the daughter of Zion: "Behold your God."

And now the fountain of *Comfort* flows eternally, and now the people of the Lord dare to face their sorrow, because as one that is comforted of his mother, with holy devotion in the midst of their sorrow they triumph.

II

AN HABITATION OF GOD THROUGH THE SPIRIT.

FTER Jesus' ascension into heaven the greatest event in the Kingdom of heaven is the descent of the Holy Ghost, which the Church of Christ commemorates at Pentecost. Before He ascended He had promised: "I shall send you the Holy Ghost." And now that He is gone away, has entered into the heaven of heavens, has seated Himself at the right hand of the Father on the throne of glory, now *it takes place* as He had foretold, it comes to pass as He had promised His apostles: the Holy Ghost comes down upon the earth.

Apart from the working of that Spirit, and leaving aside for a moment the significance of His descent, the fact itself of this outpouring is a *sign* from that invisible world, which withdraws itself from our eye back of the veil of eternity. It is as though after His arrival in heaven Jesus signals to us that He has ascended His throne. For the Holy Spirit did not *come*, but was *sent*, was *poured out*, was *effused* in the Church of God. What makes Pentecost Pentecost is not something the Holy Spirit did, but what Immanuel did. He *received* the Holy Spirit from the Father, and *sent* Him from the Father to us. So He had taught and prophesied it, and so the result has given an *echo* to His witness and an *Amen* ot His prophecy. It was told the disciples that they should tarry at Jerusalem and await the fulfilment of the promise which He had left behind Him. And they have waited for it; waited ten long days; and then their unshakable expectation has been crowned. The Lord Who ascended into heaven,

has from that heaven made His promise true. This Jesus, so spake Peter on the day of Pentecost, Whom ye, O Jews, have put to the tree and killed, He it is Who has worked this wonder-sign, and has poured out what now you see and hear.

Do not remove, therefore, from its connection what in the facts themselves directly hangs together. On the day of Pentecost you may not lose yourself in mere spiritual effusions on the Holy Spirit and His operations. At Pentecost you should first think of your Savior in the heavens. It is He, your from suffering exalted Immanuel, from Whom all working goes out on the holy Pentecost day.

Of course, not as though you may not count with the Holy Ghost Himself and trace His holy operations, provided you so do this, that on Pentecost day you do this differently from other days. For the Holy Ghost is from everlasting; already at the creation He moved upon the waters; and there has been no day or hour, as long as man has dwelt upon this earth before the face of God, that He has ever ceased to operate upon the human heart. The most ordinary motion in the conscience, even among heathen nations, is absolutely unthinkable, if you should think the Holy Spirit out of being, and close your eye to His working upon our human heart. And no sooner does the particular grace of God with Abraham and the Patriarchs form *an own people* for itself (Isa. 63: 11), but all the days of Israel's sacred history it is the Holy Ghost, "Who has been put in the midst of them", has animated their heroes, prophets and priests; has comforted and led them on their ways; and terrified them in their evil by reason of the anger of the Lord God.

Hence the case is not, that before Pentecost the Holy Ghost was never heard of, and nothing regarding

Him had been observed, so that now suddenly, and for the first time, the existence, the being, and the working of the Holy Ghost was discovered. This verdict finds no support with him, who knows the Scriptures of the Old Covenant; and so he can not speak, who knows from the narrative of the Gospels how already before His ascension the Lord Jesus had breathed upon His apostles, saying unto them: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost".

No, the Holy Ghost Who came on the day of Pentecost, was not a holy One unknown; was not something new; was not a thus far hidden and silent spirit; but an old acquaintance, Who all those years and centuries, had accompanied Israel and His saints on their thorny roads.

When, therefore, on the day of Pentecost you say nothing else of the Holy Ghost, than was so in all ages, and was counted as truth already before Prophets and Psalmists, and already before Jesus' ascension had been experienced by the disciples, then it speaks for itself that you really *cipher away* your Pentecost; without meaning it you *deny* the great, mighty miracle of Pentecost day; and frankly show that you neither understand nor perceive what, in the Kingdom of heaven, the Pentecost event stands for.

And yet it is not very difficult to see clearly and understandingly what the real significance of the sublime Pentecost miracle is.

Under the dispensation of shadows God had a Tabernacle in Israel, which presently gave place to His temple on Mount Moriah. Now that Tabernacle and that Temple both were evidently purely symbolic. God dwells not in a temple made with hands. And therefore both that Tabernacle and that Temple were in-

tended, at His own time, *to pass away*. But, and consider this, to pass away only when the Lord would have found another dwelling-place here on earth, even a spiritual habitation, such as comports with the majesty of His Divine Being.

And herein lies the whole antithesis, that after the day of Pentecost God the Lord actually possesses such a spiritual habitation on earth. After the day of Pentecost the Church of Christ is *"a habitation of God in the Spirit."* That Church of Christ is become His "spiritual temple". The congregation of the Lord is a "spiritual house", in which God "takes up His abode". Altogether in keeping with what Jesus had said to His disciples, that He and the Father would come and make their *abode with them*.

So one stands over against the other. Before the day of Pentecost the Temple on Moriah is God's habitation in symbol, as the place of which the Lord had said again and again: "Here is the place of my rest. Here will I dwell." But *after* the day of Pentecost the Temple on Moriah has lost this excellent significance. The veil had already been torn and presently the whole Temple goes up in flames. But now there is on earth *another* temple, another *habitation of God* in the Spirit. And this sanctuary is not made of stone, and stands no longer on Mount Moriah, but is the congregation of the living God, the church of Christ in the earth.

Hence two Temples; first the stone Temple on Moriah, and, after this ended, the living Temple of God in the redeemed ones of the Lord; and the transition from that Temple of stone to that living habitation of God is formed by what took place on the day of Pentecost.

At the consecration of the Tabernacle and of the

Temple there was one striking moment, when in a cloud of fire the presence of the Lord manifested itself in His sanctuary, so that they who saw it, felt: "A moment ago the presence of the Lord was not here, and now, with the coming in of this column of light, the Lord has gone into His sanctuary and has come down to the place of His rest."

And parallel to this runs the event on the day of Pentecost. Here also the habitation was first prepared. The Word is become flesh. This Immanuel has united a company of believers to Himself. So the habitation of God stands ready. Now must the moment come, in which God the Lord takes possession of this His habitation, and enters into it, and this is the moment when the tongues of fire were seen and the sound in the heavens is heard. Then God came down, not in a column of fire at this time to His *symbolic* sanctuary, but in fire and sound of wind to His living temple—and so was the Holy Ghost poured out.

This had been foretold.

When David girded himself to build the Lord a temple of stone, he did this, however well intentioned, in an external sense, not understanding the leadings of God, and not perceiving that a temple of stone could never be the real habitation of Jehovah. Therefore he is hindered in his plan, and God turns it about, and says that He will build David an house, and that this should be the house, in which with His majesty He would for ever dwell. That house was David's family, and from that family after the flesh descended *the Christ*, Who, Himself God, took *our human nature* as His temple; and therefore to the Jews, who called for their temple of stone, He said:

"Break down this bodily temple, and I will build it up again in three days." That living temple of His human nature *the Jew* would break down, but *He* would build it up; and the temple of stone, which the Jew had *built,* He would *break down,* so that no stone would be left upon the other.

So the Temple of stone has to pass away, and the *living habitation of God* had to come in its stead, and in that living habitation God would make His abode.

Now the question is, how you are to represent to yourself that living habitation of God, and in what sense the church is the temple of the Holy Ghost.

It is this, as all the Gospel tells you, not apart from the Christ. Rather of this abode of God Christ is the living corner-stone. He Who is Himself God, began by choosing our human nature as a tabernacle for Himself, and thus that human nature, which He took for His own person, He has chosen as an abode for His own Godhood. So you can really say, that already by Himself, taken independently of His congregation, Immanuel gives you to see an habitation of God. God is in Him.

Christ took upon Himself our human nature, not that He might robe Himself with the garment of our nature, but that through that human nature He might have fellowship *with us.* Therefore He did not take unto Himself a human person, but *our nature,* which is common to all men, and thus put Himself in relation and fellowship with our *whole* race.

Thence it is that through the wondrous faith and the wondrous regeneration that lies back of it, there are now all sorts of people united with Immanuel, and are so bound with Him into one whole, that they are as one planting with Him, members of one selfsame body, of which He is the Head; or if you

will living stones set in the wall of the house of God, of which He is the chief cornerstone. So does Christ, Who already in His own person represents the habitation of God, take up into Himself a whole multitude of believers, incorporates them in Himself, and makes them fuse with Himself into one whole. And in this way there forms itself that broad, living house of God, that is formed from thousands and again thousands of persons, a multitude no one can number; and which all together are set in one as living stones and bound together by the cement of the blood of Golgotha, together to constitute that one, living, abiding habitation of God, in which as in His temple God shall for ever dwell.

Thus Body and Temple are not the same. We are members of the Body of Christ, because we have been incorporated in Him and with Him we have become one compact living whole, as one organism, that receives from Him as Head the motion and the direction of life. But with respect to *God the Lord*, we are not a *body* but an *habitation*, His *Temple*, to which He will quickly come, to make His abode in us. With Jesus we are bound together into one living organism; and this was possible, because He took our human nature. But before the Lord our God we can never be other than His *habitation* (Eph. 2:22), because however near God the Lord may make His approach to us, as God He remains for ever distinguished from us, even as you always remain distinct from the house in which you live.

It even can and must be said, that Jesus *together with us* form the house, the temple and the habitation, in which God makes His abode. He belongs to that house. That house without Him is unthinkable. He is its cornerstone. And therefore we read, that

not merely the church, but Jesus Himself, had first to receive the Holy Ghost. Thus spake Peter (Acts 2:33): "He being by the right hand of God exalted, and *having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost*, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear."

And herewith agrees the fixed expression of the miracle of Pentecost. It is called the "outpouring of the Holy Ghost". Of itself this can not be said of an house, a temple or a dwelling. In a house one moves in, in a temple one chooses the place of his rest, in a dwelling one makes his abode. But here it is called: "the *outpouring* of the Holy Ghost." Yet let not this *outpouring* be misunderstood. There are two sorts of outpouring. One is an outpouring from above, over something, as the Preacher says: "If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth" (Eccl. 2:3); and here it is by no means meant in this way. The outpouring of the Holy Ghost does not mean to say, that like a great rain from above the Holy Ghost was poured out over or upon the disciples; that they caught or gathered this; and that therefore every time again such an outpouring must take place. He who interprets it like this, does not understand the significance of Pentecost day. No, outpouring here means, as water from a water-main empties itself into the pipes that lead into the houses; as blood pours itself out in us through our veins, if for one moment you could imagine your body as without blood. It is the Body of the Lord, that at first is yet without its spirit of life. But now Immanuel, Who is the Head of the Body, receives the Spirit from His Father; And as soon as this Spirit is in the Head, that Spirit is poured out from this Head into all the Body, through all arteries and veins. Alto-

gether in the sense in which in Rom. 5:5 Paul says: "that the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts." And as our fathers said: "that the Holy Spirit dwells in Him as the Head and in us as the members of His Body, so that thus we are bound by one Spirit as members of one Body."

Now this Body of the Lord, into which the Holy Ghost has shed Himself abroad, through all the channels of the hidden system of veins, is by and in consequence of this outpouring, the *habitation of God.* For it is the Holy Ghost, Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son; and the Holy Spirit is the very Person in the Triune Being of God, Who in the spirit of man leads and directs. But always to be taken in this way, that for no single moment you can think this Holy Spirit separated from the Father or the Son; but rather consider well, how in that Holy Spirit the Father and the Son themselves come to you, and make their abode in your heart.

Yet even this you should not interpret all too personally and too individually of your own soul as something standing by itself alone. Your soul does not exist by itself, any more than a leaf on a tree exists by itself. There is no leaf but there is a tree to which that leaf belongs; to which tree again there are other leaves, which together with the one leaf form the foliage. And so it is here. There is no man, but there is a human race from which this man sprang, and even in this way, that from that same race a multitude of other men sprang, which with you form one race. So the race is one, and therefore it had one head in Adam. And because God created Adam after His image, therefore that man and so

that human race is disposed, to be an *habitation of God.* And although sin broke that wonderful destiny, God did not therefore abandon it. His habitation must not be *one* man, neither a certain arbitrary collection of men, but His habitation was and should continue to be *that human race,* that trunk, that tree of humanity, wherein lay all kinds of human nature.

Hence it should not be taken, as though Jesus plucked a few leaves and blossoms from that tree; and from this is forming a whole, which He calls His church; that now *that tree* might wither and *that trunk* might presently be consigned to the lake of fire.

No, the case is just the opposite. What Jesus takes upon Himself is your human nature, and what He comes to save is your human race. What He saves is that trunk, that tree, that organism of our human existence. They therefore, who believe in Christ, *remain* on that tree, and he who does *not* believe, falls away from it and goes into the eternal pain. So is your race, your human nature, the pedigree of humanity brought into heaven, and what goes into hell are withered leaves and branches, which are torn off from the pedigree of your race. Therefore Christ comes in the place of Adam, as the new Head of your race. Thus the Body of the Lord is your human race itself, only purified, and after the shaking and tearing off of everything that does not cleave to Christ.

And that this might be made clear, the day of Pentecost simultaneously brings to nought the fact of the building of the tower of Babel.

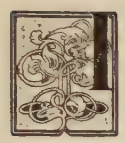
There, on account of sin, our trunk was broken and split, and in the break of languages our unity

destroyed. The one no longer understood the other.

But here on the day of Pentecost that broken unity is again restored. From thence it is that one speaks, and that all understand that one. The unity of all nations and tongues is found again. It became again, what it was in God's creation, and must forever remain: *One body.*

III

"TO DRINK INTO ONE SPIRIT."



T is a glorious remembrance which each year Pentecost brings.

One often speaks of a *Reveille,* in quietness of soul one longs for à *Quickening,* one thirsts after a *Revivifying* of one's own and another's spirit. But what meaning has the whole history of these revivals, compared with what then happened in Jerusalem?

After the coming into this world of *God the Son* in the *Incarnation,* now the coming to us of *God the Holy Spirit,* in this altogether unique *Outpouring?* In Bethlehem the coming of God to our *race,* but here in the upper room at Pentecost the coming of God to the soul *personally.* In two stadia the consummation. We form first a family, then a people, and so the one humanity; but in that family, among that people, in that humanity, each one has a personal life, an existence of one's own soul. And so, for the consummation of the fellowship with God there was needed a twofold thing. First our race had to be restored to the fellowship again, and that took place when God, the Son, took our *human nature* upon Him. But with this it could not rest. The foundation indeed was laid thereby, but the object had not yet been gained, and that this goal might be reached, fellowship with God had to be restored not merely for our race, but also for the *individual person.* And this was effected at Pentecost, when God, the Holy Ghost, entered into the personal soul of the Apostles, but in such a way that the unity continued, that in

the Body of Christ the solidarity of all was not lost, but increased.

This event is unique in history, equally as unique as Bethlehem.

As the Son could not a second time become Flesh, because He now is and lives in our human nature, so God the Holy Ghost could not come a second time to make His abode with us, for the all sufficient reason, that He since has *remained* with us, has never left us again, and did not come in with us provisionally to pass the night, but to make His habitation with us, and now dwells with us forever.

That world dominating event took place at Jerusalem; not in Greece with its philosophical knowledge; not among the Romans, those men of the mighty deed; but on Zion, close by the temple, in an upper room, which was connected with the house of God.

And that outpouring of the Holy Ghost took place in Jews, in descendants of Abraham, in sons of Israel. As Jesus took our human nature from Jesse's tribe, and therefore said: "Salvation is of the Jews," so the fixed rule of God's Kingdom is honored here: From Israel it goes forth; from Israel, because he had been chosen for this, and this coming of God the Holy Ghost, to make His abode with us, even as the Incarnation, took place in us men, yea, in our human nature, but as in Israel, through Isaac's wondrous birth, it had been particularized. Not only in the first stadium of Bethlehem, but also in the second stadium, in Zion's halls, salvation is come to us through the middle link of the Jews.

This is emphasized, not to make the Jews great, for there is nothing more dreadful than the stiffneckedness wherewith the Jews as a people, from

the days of Solomon on, had sinned against God and roused the Holy One of Israel to anger. In addition to this, they have crucified the Lord of Glory. And when the Holy Spirit was poured out, they made light of it, and as though it were an outpouring of drunkenness, they first laughed at it. In the Jews there is nothing so small as the Jew, but great in the Jews is the God of Israel, Who *with* such a people and *through* such a people, has brought to pass such great, such glorious things.

The fame and the glory is not for the chosen people, but for that God, Who chose that people.

And so that selfsame God on that day of Pentecost had prepared for Himself out of that stiffnecked people a small company of believers. A hundred at most. Among them a Peter, who with cursing and swearing had three times denied Jesus, and a Thomas who would not believe, unless he could see and handle; and along with these the other nine disciples, who in Gethsemane had left Jesus to His fate, so that angels had to come to His help in their stead, the whiles they turned and fled. By no means a perfect company therefore, but for all that, men and women whose heart the Lord had touched. Vessels made meet for Him, men and women with a spirituality of soul, that was receptive for Jesus, and capable of receiving the coming Holy Ghost.

It is against all Scripture therefore and the dispensation of grace, when dear Christian people imagine, that the outpouring of the Holy Ghost can ever repeat itself. Those devoutly disposed souls thirst indeed after a more intensely spiritual stimulus, after higher exaltation of soul, after warmer glow of love in the heart. And reading what took place at Jerusalem on that great feast of Pentecost, their soul melts within them at the delightful thought

that it might take place in their company, in their circle, in their home, in their soul. They cry, and they pray that once more, now that they themselves are here, this mighty miracle might be reënacted.

And this earnest desire by itself is good, it is from God, and they, who have never known that deep longing in their own soul after the Holy Spirit, who look down from the height upon those who pray this one-sided prayer, shall for their cold indifference once pass under heavier judgment.

Revival must needs take place again and again.

Even as the weather and as nature, so our spiritual life has its seasons. In our heart it is not always equally cold, and not always equally warm. An even spiritual temperature goes against our human nature. With one indeed change is more marked than with the other. There are those with whom the summer and winter in their heart differs by only a few degrees, even as in nature under the tropics. But it is not so as a rule. As a rule it may be said, that the transitions from cold into warm, and from warm into the cold season of the spiritual life, are fairly sharply drawn. At one time you find souls almost petrified, at another time they melt by reason of spiritual riches.

Hence the case is not put too strongly, when we say, that even as our streams at one time are bound by floors of ice, and at another time flow with purling waters, so likewise in the world of the spiritual life at one time the stream is frozen, and at another time it runs with highly swollen waters.

From thence the every time returning need of Revival, of new Animation, of Revivification, of Reveille, provided it be not overlooked, that this is always an *extra*ordinary impulse for a short while, which can be no rule, and must everytime pass over

again into the *ordinary,* which it was bound to bring up to a somewhat higher diapason.

Revivals, that leave nothing behind, are not of God. They are manufactured and artificial. *Excitement* more than *Revival* is their fitting name. Play of the imagination, without reality of the Spirit. A game which is so easily played, because such excitement of feeling communicates itself so readily to others, and by over-stimulation can be turned into a sort of wild passion as has so frequently been seen in history.

Especially people of more sentiment than conscience are susceptible to this, and therefore it is always highly necessary to taste these spirits whether they be inimical.

But when there really is a thirst alive in the soul after more vital fellowship of the Spirit, after more tenderness of conscience, after warmer glow of love in the heart, then indeed, such a deepening desire is glorious, and in most cases is harbinger of more powerful workings of the Spirit to come.

But this is not new *outpouring* of the Holy Spirit. This is not possible, because the Holy Spirit was never away, and consequently He *can not come a second time.* It is rather a coming out again on the part of the Holy Ghost, Who had hid Himself. It is as the coming back to consciousness of one who had become faint, and in whom life had become inoperative. Even as one can become pale as death, because the blood drew itself back in him, and presently life comes back into his face, when the blood comes to the surface again, such was the state of one who was spiritually desolate. The Spirit was still in him, but the Spirit in him was in hiding. And spiritual revival is, that that Spirit, Who did not leave *him* for

one moment, but Whom *he* deserted, and Who therefore could not be observed in him, now begins to operate again, and makes the flush of life come back to the face of his soul.

To deem that the Holy Spirit everytime goes away from earth again to heaven, and anew from heaven must be outpoured on us, is not a mere mistake, but a lack of appreciation of the whole course of holy revelation, a want of understanding of what the life of the church is, and especially an ignoring of the fact, that what was poured out, is not *power* of the Spirit, but God the Holy Ghost Himself.

For by this revival, wrongly understood, is not meant, that after having gone away from earth, God comes back to it again, but that from heaven God might shed abroad in our hearts new spiritual *power and animation.* If one calls this "The outpouring of the Holy Ghost" and prays for it as a repetition of the Pentecost-miracle, he shows thereby that he takes the Pentecost-miracle merely as an effusion and outpouring of spiritual *powers,* that he does not grasp the high and altogether unique significance, of the coming of God the Holy Ghost to the church of God, and hence does not believe it.

As necessary therefore as it is, continually to make the church, and in the church the several believers, understand, that they should not be content with the winter in their heart, but be on the outlook again for the spring-time of the Spirit and the summer of spiritual life, yea, that they should pray for it, it is equally necessary, to teach the church the *true character* of such revival, and over against every other revival of later date steadfastly to maintain the altogether unique character of the event that took place in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Let not the incontrovertible truth therefore that

Pentecost is the coming of God, not to our race, but into the personal existence of the soul, be misinterpreted.

That this was the case, the narrative clearly shows, and the single expression: "It sat upon each of them" (Acts 2:3), makes the matter plain. Above every one's head there was the sparkling, the glittering, if we may say so of a heavenly-electrical glow. Here there is no hierarchy, no priests stand over against laity; there is no *one,* and there are not *a few,* who bear the mark alone. No, as they were gathered there together, they were *all* filled with the Holy Ghost. Thus by no means the apostles alone, as it has been represented in pictures, but all, that full one hundred and twenty men and women, all bore the mark of fire on the head and all became possessed of holy ecstacy. And that indeed it was no common good, that they received, but that personally, head for head, they all had part in it, is evident from the fact that they gave utterances to what filled them inwardly. They all began to speak in wondrous, heavenly accents, to the astonishment of all who heard them.

Moreover Peter's appeal to Joel's prophecy proves it. For how could he say, that the prophecy had been fulfilled, that "your sons and your daughters shall prophecy," if the younger men and women who were there, had had no part in the miracle of fire and in the miracle of languages, and if the whole company had not broken loose in praise and adoration in a way, which altogether excelled their ordinary manner of speech?

Let not this be therefore a matter of dispute. The outpouring of the Holy Ghost took place in every one of those who were gathered there. All had a part in it. And the distinguishing mark of it was,

that this part was *personal* for all. For utterance in language of praise does not come from the soul, except as that soul has *personally* been apprehended, and *personally* stands under the mighty impression.

"It sat upon each of them" is but the external delineation therefore of what took place internally, in the spiritual domain, and of this also it can be said: The "Spirit made His abode with each one personally."

Thus the narrative itself, as well as the nature of the Spirit admits of no other explanation, so soon as His purpose is, not to work "powers", but *to make* His abode.

For apart from Pentecost the world is by no means without all sorts of inworkings of the Holy Ghost. How could the Holy Ghost, Who is Himself God and with the Father and the Son is one eternal Being, stand outside of the life of nature? Nothing lives, in heaven and in earth as plants, animals or men, but lives with a spark of light which the Holy Ghost has ignited. There is among men no single power of thought or will, no talent and no gift, to which God the Holy Ghost is foreign. Not only in Israel did the Holy Spirit operate in Bezaliel and Aholiab but also among the heathen in a Plato and Cicero. In another way, be it so, and we least of all deny this, but even so in all this broad domain there were workings of the Holy Spirit.

At closer range, even before Pentecost there were saving operations on the part of the Holy Ghost. Under the Old Covenant souls have been regenerated unto faith and brought unto life. The Holy Spirit has worked in the prophets, has operated in David and Solomon, has worked in official gifts. According to Isaiah the Holy Spirit "was set in the midst of

Israel". And when John the Baptist came, and presently Jesus Himself appeared, there were on every side mighty workings of the Spirit, powers of the Spirit that went abroad: and did not Jesus breathe upon His own, saying: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost."

But what took place on Pentecost, was something altogether different. No telephoning any longer from afar, no radiations with beams of light, no giving of signs and tokens, no sending out of gifts and talents. No, on that day of Pentecost there appeared at last the Holy Ghost Himself, came down to come to us, as God He entered into the human heart, and sanctified that human heart as a temple unto Himself, in which His presence could be known.

It is the meeting of God in person with man in person. The standing in *relation* and in *covenant* between the two, had always been. Even personal meetings in Theophanies, to Abraham, to Hagar and others had been known. Since Bethlehem there had been the personal meeting of Him Who could say: "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father." But what had hitherto not been known, was the personal meeting of man with God *in the inner chamber of his own heart.* It had been from without, but not from within. Not yet in the center of our inner being. Going out on the way God's presence had been perceived, but God had not entered into our own habitation, nor into our more intimate existence, neither into our life hidden from every one else. What we call meeting one in private, so that every separation falls away, and self stands over against self, to bring person and person into closest contact and into tenderest touch, that had *not* happened hitherto, and

that is the miracle of miracles, that took place on that unique day of Pentecost.

The indwelling of God in the heart, is for all the redeemed, for all who believe, the striking thought of Pentecost. Before God's omniscience even the unbeliever fell. That nothing in our doings or non-doings is hid from God, devils too believe and they tremble. Every child knows about the "All-seeing eye". But it is something altogether different, to stand and to live in the blessed consciousness, that God the Holy Spirit, is personally with us, that He is in us, and dwells in us. That in our own heart we are never alone, but that God Himself has His habitation there with us. That the smallest, finest impulses of our soul, already in their first beginnings, are spied in us by God Himself. That when we sleep and know nothing of it, God Himself in our hearts keeps watch over our heart. That when we can not pray, God the Holy Ghost in our own heart prays with groanings that can not be uttered. And thus as well, that even no sinful thought can pass through our heart, but God Himself, if we may so express ourselves, in our innermost self scans it with holy anger.

And this is so, not only in those individual moments, when we think of it, in those individual instances, at which we comfort ourselves with that indwelling, but this is so continually, constantly, also when we do *not* think of it, yea, this can have been so in us already from our infancy, before we had ever taken the name of the Holy Ghost in our lips.

The church of the living God is a spot of light in the midst of the darknesses of this world, and that light is not an outshining from above, but an out-

shining from within out, of God the Holy Ghost, Who dwells in the church.

Only by that coming down of God the Holy Ghost, fellowship with the Eternal Being has come to its highest, its richest intimacy.

Religion, i. e. communion between man and the eternal Being, in its richest, fullest sense, is only possible *in* that church, *through* that indwelling, exclusively as the result of the Pentecost miracle.

And finally as regards the question, whether this personal indwelling of God the Holy Ghost in every believer specially and personally, does not break the unity and split the communion in the church of God, the holy apostle says: By no means, for we all have been made to drink into one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13).

Baptism and Holy Communion enclose us here.

In this same verse St. Paul declares, by one Spirit are we all *baptized* into one Body, and likewise we have all been made *to drink* into one Spirit. The water of Baptism and the cup at Holy Communion prove and seal this oneness.

It it were an other spirit, who indwelled with you, and still an other spirit who indwelled with the brother, then there would be division, splitting and separation, and who would be satisfied with the indwelling of his particular spirit?

But such is not the case.

For there is not Spirit and spirit, but it is one God, the Holy Spirit, Who indivisible and unique in Himself, Himself indwells in the hearts of believers, and because the *same Spirit* indwells in the hearts of all, that indwelling of the Spirit forms the strongest guarantee of communion.

Could this indwelling Spirit therefore shine out clearly and brightly from all hearts, all hearts would melt into one, to receive all in one glow of love, and richest, highest unity would glisten before all eyes.

But such it can not do. God truly dwells in us, but the inner chamber of our heart is continually closed, and the windows shut, and all sorts of vapor and smoke contract within and outside of us.

Hence frequently we do not know ourselves whether God dwells in us, how then should the brother be able to observe it? And thereby, and thereby alone, come the separations, the estrangements, the embitterments. Then the Holy Spirit can not shine out, and our unsanctified spirits look abroad, and see one the other in anything but inviting and enticing aspects.

Everything would be eternally scattered, if God the Holy Ghost did not dwell in us, inwardly maintaining the oneness, and keeping it intact till we die, in order, after the falling away of the body of death, to make the unity of all the redeemed shine forth gloriously.

Woe to him therefore, who in the face of this continues in sin and gives in to his quarrelsome and love-impoverished heart.

You were baptized without knowing it, but at the holy Table fully conscious of yourself you are made to drink into one Spirit, and the blessing of that Table is lost to you, when with that holy cup you do not believe, expect and seek the unity of the Body of the Lord, and the unity of the Spirit Who dwells in all the members of that Body.

And therefore, it is God the Holy Spirit, Who, dwelling in us, in the face of all our divisions, still

guarantees the unity of the Body through the unity of the Spirit; and also on your part, from your side according to the Divine ordinance that unity must ever be held in sight, that unity must ever be striven after, that unity must ever be prayed for.

The unity of the Body through the unity of the Spirit is the call of Pentecost.

He who has given no hearing to that call, has grieved God the Holy Ghost.

IV

"IT IS ONE BODY, AND ONE SPIRIT."

DEVOUTLY to relive the Pentecost joy of the Body of the Lord, demands high tension and exertion of your soul in her pursuit after godliness. Not because the thrilling story of what once took place in the upper room at Jerusalem is too intricate for you, somewhat bewildering, or too incomplete; but because even in this *sacred* story human language and human words are not able to lend a sufficiently definite form to your imagination and your representation, of what spiritually took place and of what was effected that day in the sphere of the Spirit, so that an image with *clear* outlines can stand before your soul's perception, an *image* in *fixed* proportions.

The Holy Spirit is poured out. God the Holy Ghost is come down into the Body of Christ on earth!

A thought, which already at the hearing, brings you delight, but .... *how* to grasp it, above all *how* to hold it fast?

When in the *work of creation*, at the beginning of things, the almighty power of the Father works its miracles, that *almighty power* too is invisible, incomprehensible and by our human perception can not be analyzed nor imaged; but .... of this almighty power you see at once *the product full of majesty in* the firmament that glistens from above and in the earth with its paradise splendor.

So the almightiness of the Father is revealed to you in what is *wrought* by His almightiness.

So when in the *work of redemption*, at the beginning of the new dispensation, the Son of God comes down to this earthly creation as the Incarnate Word, to reveal to you the majesty of holiest love, the inner majesty of that Son of God truly remains hidden from you, but you have *the Babe* born of Mary, and presently something of the inner being of your Savior plays through the features of His human face; and the apostles can glory in the fact, that they have *seen something*, yea with their hands they have *handled* something of the Word of Life.

But when it comes to the altogether special revelation of *the third Person* in the Triune Being, and the mighty work of the sanctification of our race begins, as God the Holy Ghost pours Himself out in the Body of Christ on earth, the Divine work *remains* hidden behind the veil; and though here too there is a sacrosanct work and an effect in every way Divine, there is nothing your eye can see, or your hand can *handle;* and when the evening has come at the close of Pentecost day, Jerusalem stands just as it stood in the morning, and you see the apostles and the multitudes turn homeward, without their person being visibly enriched with anything new, with something that was not there in the morning.

It is true, that for one moment in that upper room a holy sound from above was heard, and that cloven tongues as of fire flamed above the head of every elect, and also that in the afternoon *wondrous sounds* or accents were overheard and in an equally wonderful way understood. But while at the creation the work of heaven and of earth remained, and at the *Incarnation* the *Babe*, toward which all angels travelled, lay in the manger, here everything that affected your senses is vanished as quickly, as it appeared.

That sound as of a mighty rushing wind lasted but one moment. Above the head of believers twinkles no longer even the faintest light. And already when Peter begins his celebrated sermon, the miracle of tongues is gone.

There *was* something in the sphere of the observable, but only for one fleeting moment. Not a work of the incoming of the Spirit, but merely a directive brightness, that accompanied His outpouring.

It was as an inshining from the high loftiness, when for one moment the gates of heaven opened, but equally quickly vanished when the eternal doors closed themselves again.

O, truly, now also there *was* a work, even no less a work than that from now on God the Holy Ghost indwelled in the living Church of the Son and had chosen and sanctified for Himself the Body of Christ as His temple; but that effect remained *hidden* to the sensual eye, could only be *believed* at the word, and be perceived with the *mysticism* of the heart. Even a Peter could scarcely begin to think it all out; to understand it, explain it, see through it and comprehend it, neither he nor any one was able.

And if at any time, surely at Pentecost the confession of the Psalmist is appropriate in our lips: "With Thee, O Lord, is the fountain of life; in thy light alone *we* see this light (36:9). All praised be thy grace!"

And yet, compared with the Creation and the Incarnation, *the outpouring of the Holy Ghost* stands as little secondary in majesty as in glory.

Rather it is only in this third exhibition of grace, that both Divine operations that preceded it, reach their goal, their end, their rest.

In creation there appeared the form of things; in the Incarnation the original purity regained its dominion over what in those forms of things had become degenerate and deformed. But only here with the Outpouring of the Holy Ghost those forms are aglow with Spirit and after the manner of germs become manifest in their perfection and consummation.

The natural is first, i. e. creation, after that in the Incarnation comes the victory over that which is against nature, but only now with the outpouring of the Holy Ghost comes the purely *Spiritual*; and therein the Divine, the altogether perfect, the highest, above which no higher can go out.

Test this by yourself.

From Creation, through the generations, you have received your flesh and blood, and by creation inbreaking upon the first the existence of your soul. In the Incarnation of the Word you also have been visited by the "Dayspring from on high" and the tender mercy of our God. But when, glorying in the fact that God hath chosen you, and knowing that He has regenerated you, you are permitted to own yourself as *His child* and Him as your dear *Father* in heaven, and can lay your hand upon your heart, and not hesitantly but with perfect certainty can joyously declare: *"Here in my heart dwells* God the Holy Ghost, in my own soul praying for that soul, anointing and sanctifying me, and forming to be a temple of His habitation that same heart, that I by guilt and sin had desecrated".... then every nerve that thrills in your soul seals it unto you, then every breath that passes through your lips bears witness of it to you, then every throb of your heart's blood declares it unto you, that so to carry about God the Holy Spirit

with you in your innermost self, to have Him more intimately and closer to your soul, than you shall ever be able to make that approach yourself, and in times of need and death—when light shines and in darknesses—whether you sleep or wake, thus inseverably and unshakably in the center of your being to be united with your God, is a delight, a joy of the soul, a matter of glorying, that far surpasses everything that the creature can ever taste of wealth of soul, and excels it.

The psalmist glories in the *hidden walk* with God, and he who like Abraham, is permitted to associate with God as with a friend, rejoices in the *communion* with the Eternal Being.

And surely *this* already passes the limit of what the creature of itself could ever expect, and transcends every benefit of the salvation, for which a sinner dared to hope.

In the "hidden walk", however, there is but a mere hearing of what God speaks and a prayerful address to Him. And in the "communion with the Eternal Being" there is but an awareness of the thrill of His majesty in the soul and of the glow of His Divine heart. But here there is an *inbeing of the Holy Spirit in you*, not occasionally, not now and then, but for ever, and to remain with you forever. A habitation in you as in His temple, even before your soul was aware or had taken notice of it.

A mystical union in the hiddenness of being of God Almighty with you, His helpless creature.

Yea, even with this enough has not been said.

It is One body, so the holy apostle of the Lord declares it unto you, *it is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling* (Eph. 4:4).

That outpouring and down-coming of God the Holy Ghost is therefore no personal closed matter; valid for you yourself, and similarly in other houses equally independently valid for an other.

The Holy Spirit was not first poured out on the day of Pentecost, and, when in our good land our idolatrous fathers were converted, outpoured again anew; and when your father and your mother came to life outpoured again in them, and at last even so outpoured in your soul, when you also passed over from death unto life, in like manner every time anew to be outpoured upon your child, upon your child's child, to the third and fourth generation, provided at least they too are chosen from the seed of the church, and are sanctified in Christ.

Your feast of Pentecost itself announces the contrary. It does not tell of a *first* outpouring, but of *the* Outpouring of the Holy Ghost, which surely had an afterglow with the first ingathering of the heathen world, in apostolic times, but which even so is recorded in sacred history as *the* Outpouring on the day of Pentecost, altogether unique, *never* to be repeated in that way.

God the Holy Ghost, once come down and outpoured in the Body of Christ, does not withdraw Himself, to return again later on, but, once having come to us, He made His *abode* with us, chose us as His *temple* and thus remains in the Body of Christ eternally.

It is as with the light which the Greek Church ignites at her funeral services among the rows of bystanders. He who stands near the altar, lights his candle at the glow of the altar, *but he alone;* and now every next one in the row lights his candle at the burning candle of him who stands next to him, and

in a moment the light thus propagated glistens along all the rows and glitters to the furthest circumference.

And so it is here.

The apostles lighted the lamps of their soul on the day of Pentecost, but all who came after them, lighted theirs at their light, and so the light of *that* light has propagated itself, broadly among the nations and peoples, and lengthwise through the course of the ages, and now that Light of the Spirit shines and glistens the whole world over, and as it is *one Body,* so it is altogether *one Spirit* Who shines in all and glistens in every heart, and all together they form *God's holy habitation in the Spirit.*

Therefore it matters not and does not abolish the sacred reality, that the children of God are scattered over the whole earth, that you do not understand the language of many, and of the altogether great multitude you know only a few by name, nor that ecclesiastically they are divided in all sorts of ways; yea, sometimes outwardly rather stand opposed to each other and lack all fellowship. For the churches do not *make* the Body of the Lord, but from that one Body of Christ all churches are born. And back of the ecclesiastical veil, on the deep spiritual background, as it stands before God, and as His holy angels see it, there the life of all who are truly elect, is *one,* and the glow that glistens glorifying God in the soul of all is *one.* From the North to the South, and from the West to the East it is *one* Congregation that is saved; *one* Body of the Son, that is penetrated of Divine glowings; *one* habitation, *one* temple of God, with God Himself indwelling in that temple, *by the Holy Ghost.*

For this reason the Outpouring of the Holy Spirit is far more than the work of the Creation and than the Incarnation of the Word a pure *object of faith,* not to be enjoyed apart from faith, and without penetrating faith not attainable by your soul.

For of that *Body of Christ* you see nothing. What you see are people, men and women and children, each by themselves, dressed in their several garments each exhibiting a nature and a character of their own, and sometimes taking you by surprise at their spiritual richness, but frequently being an offence to you by their spiritual barrenness, their poverty of soul and sinful imperfection.

The *Body of Christ* you do not see.

What you see and your eyes behold are at most groups of confessors, now and then coming together in the house of prayer, spending there an hour or two, quietly sitting down, sometimes with the glow of animation in the eye, but not infrequently with the heavy eye of indifference with difficulty keeping sleep away from the eyelids. Often mixed along with all sorts of strange persons, who in nothing remind you of Christ, who in nothing make you think of the Christ of God, and often press the question to your lips: Might these be hypocrites?

No, the *Body of Christ* is truly *in* God's children, and God's children are incorporated *in* that Body, but it is all hidden, it all plays on a *hidden background,* it all draws itself secretly back into the *spiritual.*

How then can you perceive the *Holy Spirit,* Who dwells in that real, but invisible and mysterious Body of Christ?

Can the Holy Ghost be *seen?* And if that were possible, where in that Body would you discover

Him, so long as this Body itself remains a veiled mystery to you?

If on the evening of that great day of Pentecost you had mingled with the people in the streets of Jerusalem, and had asked some passerby: "Lead me to that Body of Christ, show me that sacred Body of the Lord, and above all tell me, where in that Body of Christ God the Holy Spirit dwells,"—he would have taken you in a back street to an humble house; there you would have found altogether ordinary people, a John, a Peter, a Mary and Salome, conversing with one another of glorious things and rejoicing in what had taken place; and if then an angel of the Lord pointing to them would have said to you: "This is the Body of Christ, and presently that Body of Christ shall go into the world, and shall extend itself to the four quarters of the earth, and in that Body of Christ there dwells God the Holy Ghost, and He shall dwell and operate in that Body eternally," it would have sounded in your ears as idle talk, and disappointed you would have whispered underbreath: "Can these people be the Body of Christ? Is that the hope of humanity?"

And in these mumbled words you would have *spoken correctly.*

For those men and women were not the ones to do it, neither would they do it; no, He Who would do it, *has* done it, and *shall* do it, is *God the Holy Ghost,* and *Him* you could not and *Him* you can not see.

But of that holy presence of God in his people on earth, he who still misses the eye of faith, perceives, detects and observes simply nothing.

To perceive that presence you must get back to the Scripture, that in that holy Scripture with thanks-

giving you may honor the Self-revelation of your God.

To discover that presence, you must read in that Holy Scripture the narrative of the Pentecost miracle and with hushed reverence read it again. You must yourself relive it as though you had been present there in that sacred hour. With it you must believe that what took place there and then was in very deed and truth the *Outpouring of the Holy Ghost,* the descent of God Himself in the Body of Christ.

More yet, to detect that *sacred presence of your God in His people on earth,* you must join yourself to that people, seek your delight in the quiet fellowship of the saints, by one spirit live with that people, and thus become conscious of your personal incorporation in the Body of Christ.

To say it more briefly, to open the eye of your soul to that *holy presence of God the* Holy Ghost on earth, the lamp of your soul must be ignited by the spark of that Spirit, in your own heart the spirit of your self must make way before that Holy Spirit, and the experience of the inworking of that Spirit in your own soul must become known.

Then only, but then surely, that "sacred presence of God the Holy Ghost in the Body of Christ" becomes to you not merely a surmisal, a possibility, but *the fact of facts,* by which your entire world- and life-view is dominated.

Then you realize, how all the value and significance of the rest of the world, compared with that Body of Christ, in which God Himself dwells, is less than nothing.

Then you *believe,* and because you believe you rejoice, and such blessed enjoyment of itself compels you to *exult* and to *confess.*

To exult not least in the holy Pentecost mystery.

For that Pentecost mystery, that descension of God on earth in the Body of Christ, is the reason for which once the world must make way before Christ, and on which for you, with all the brethren together, as long as the pilgrim journey here continues, stands *the hope of your calling.*

V

"WITH GIFTS FOR THE COMFORT OF MEN."

N Paradise the earth was not watered by rain from above, but by a mist or vapor, that rose from the earth, and was absorbed again by the earth. For so it reads (Gen. 2:5, 6): "The Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, ... but there went up a mist from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground."

But when sin had robbed that Divine Paradise of its glory, the mists drew themselves up higher; formed themselves against heaven into clouds; and so that wondrous rain came down upon the earth, wherewith, according to Jesus' word, God "rains upon the righteous and unrighteous".

Significant symbolism of nature!

Stone cold and withering under the curse, the earth lay spread out before the eye of man, and of itself could bring forth nothing but weeds, and thorns, and thistles. But *from above* the light comes down, from the *firmament* radiates the heat of the sun, and from *God's heaven* drops down all barrenness overcoming, all herbs refreshing, and all earth-clods fertile making rain.

And especially that rain *speaks*.

For sunheat too comes from above, but *seems* in morning-red rather to come up from behind the earth, and to reach heaven in its zenith. Rain on the other hand you *hear* come down from heaven. Rain drops with a rushing sound upon the tops of the trees, splashes on the roof of your dwelling,

rattles against your streets, and when frozen stiff in hail, it is as though from above there is a knocking with hailstones against your windowpanes.

But even with ordinary rain you *hear* the rushing sound that comes from above, you *see* the dropping in sheets pour downwards from above, and *feel* on hand or face, that the outpouring of that refreshing splashing comes to you from above.

Without exaggeration it may be said, that in nothing so clearly as in that down-splashing rain, God tells us audibly, that He is there above, and as from His habitation sends us the glorious gift of rain, that comes to refresh the earth.

An imagery, difficult to grasp in a land of constant rain, such as the Netherlands is, but one which is drunk in with all the wealth of soul in a land such as the Holy land was.

A land with only two steady rains in the year, and for the rest ever without rain, so that things withered more and more, to look forward breathlessly to the distant day, when to the comfort of men again, the gift of God's mild, refreshing rain would come down from heaven.

Is it our ingenious invention that puts this metaphorical speech in the rain? Or is this metaphorical, this symbolical significance put into it by God Himself?

To answer this question, call to mind, what the Lord says to Israel (Hosea 10:12): "It is time to seek the Lord, till he come and *rain righteousness upon you*," as though to declare, that all righteousness springing up from man's will or work withers, and that the true, the saving righteousness can come down upon you, as *"a rain from above"* from your God alone, Who in Christ *gives* righteousness to you.

In the sixth chapter Hosea interprets this still more fully: "He Himself, the Lord, shall come to His comfort seeking people, as a rain, as the latter and former rain." (6:3.)

Already the kingly psalm contained the selfsame thought. Not alone His *gift*, but "He himself shall come down *like rain* upon the mown grass; as showers that water the earth." (72:6.)

So on one hand every "gift that comes down for the comfort of man" is called a "rain from God upon His fainting inheritance"; it is said, that the rain from above "richly waters" His own, and that every Word that goeth forth out of the mouth of God, is comparable with "the rain that cometh down from heaven and watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater" (Is. 55:10, 11). But also on the other hand that rain which as a stream comes down, is the image of God *Himself*, and with Joel the "Teacher of righteousness" is significantly named or indicated by a word that also means "rain", and as in one breath is added: "Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God, for he shall send you the *Teacher* of righteousness, and (in Him) shall cause the rain to come down upon you" (2:23, Dutch version).

This allegory of the word has not been understood by many an exegete. More than one even read nothing else in it, than the prophecy of a coming cloudburst.

But the church of God has ever understood it differently and better.

Joel, she confessed on the ground of the apostolic witness, hails prophetically in the image of the pelting rain the outpouring of the Holy Ghost.

Both, pouring rain and outpouring of the Spirit, come from above; both coming down from God; and both gifts offered to us men for our comfort.

And so image and matter could fuse into one, the Teacher of the church, i. e. the Holy Ghost, could Himself be called the Rain of God.

And according as in the image, you observe at one time the *single drops,* and again the rain as a *descending stream,* so could that image in turn speak to you of *the many gifts* of the Spirit, and in turn of that Spirit Himself, Who was given us on Pentecost day.

Scripture even loves to work out this image of the rain.

So in Psalm 65, where it is said, that God first made the land thirsty, burning of thirst and longing, and when it is come to this, God opens His river full of water above, and enriches the land greatly; God waterest the ridges thereof abundantly, and blessest the springing thereof, yea, even the pastures of the wilderness He waterest, and wherever God passes through with His rain, there His paths or footsteps drop fatness.

Isaiah also describes the going down of the rain into the depths of the earth, how it seeks the root of the plant, and waterest the earth, and how as result of the rain, every plant flourishes and buds, and so prepares fruit for sower and eater.

Altogether nature-language, as the speech of God goes forth in nature to all parts of the world, but in the nature-language God Himself unveiling to us the mysteries of His holiness, and because we are body and soul, addressing us in turn with significant images and with clear spiritual speech.

The mists going upward, and fixed on high as clouds, and from those clouds coming down in rain as gift of God to the comfort of men.

And so, our Savior *ascended* into heaven, and *set* on high at the right hand of the Father, and from that Savior *descending* upon us the gift for the comfort of men in the Holy Ghost.

The other image, that the Holy One dwells as in *a cloud,* joins itself to this.

You remember that "Cloud of glory", that was seen on the mount of Transfiguration, that filled Solomon's temple at the time of its consecration, that stood above the Tabernacle; and that at the Red Sea placed itself between Israel and Pharaoh's host.

A cloud that glowed with inward glistening at night and was therefore called a *column or pillar of fire;* but which, when the sun arose, was seen as a glowing cloud, and was then called the *pillar of cloud.*

That same cloud was seen on the mount of Olives, and which at length intercepted the Savior, Who ascended, before the eyes of the disciples.

So the majesty of God in *nature* braids itself togeher into one majestic whole with His *spiritual* mightiness, and in us is the extinguishing of soul and stupidness, when year after year we can see the clouds relieve themselves, and can *see* and *hear* their rain descend, the whiles our heart is unable to overhear and understand anything of the speech that goes out from all these works of God.

And yet at the outpouring of the Holy Ghost we have such need of that imagery of nature.

In your representation you have no form for the Holy Ghost, in incomprehended mystery the Holy

Ghost draws Himself back from before you. And after first having prepared your soul for His fellowship, the Holy Spirit ever ends again with being a name, an incomprehended sound to you, which momentarily passes through your consciousness, and equally quickly evades you.

And here that imagery of the *nature-like* life comes to your aid, and Scripture itself teaches you how in that speech of imagery you should interpret the workings of the Holy Ghost.

Your soul as the thirsty earth, made desirous after God, and yet lacking the tenderness of the fellowship of God, till the river of spiritual life discloses itself before you, and comes greatly to enrich you.

In the same course of thought in which Jesus said: "If any man thirst let him come and drink the water of life for nought, and it shall become a fountain in him, so that out of him shall flow rivers of living water" (St. John 7:37).

And you see this in the field, rain not only entering into the clods, but when these are satisfied, gathering itself in the furrows to little streams, and flow away to the deeper places, to have water in readiness, when rain-time is past.

And even as rain, so also does the Holy Spirit penetrate to the bottom of your soul, and there seeks out *the root* of your life, to spray it, water it and to saturate it.

Then that Holy Spirit softens the hard clods in your soul, and that softened and moist earth presents itself to the root of your soul's life, to be appropriated.

So is your soul simultaneously fed and watered.

The seed germinates. The germ bends itself upwards. At last comes the bud. From that bud the grain is won. And so seed ripens for the sower and bread for the eater. That is to say, your own soul is first fed spiritually, and then the hand of your soul stretches itself out in compassionate love to the fields of the future, ever and always again to sow seed, and ever to cause new growths to bud on God's spiritual acres, to the praise of His Name.

So you realize how that imagery of the speech of nature comes to your aid.

In the features of this image of rain, you see your soul before you as a barren field; you see the rain of the Spirit come down upon you; you become aware of His watering of your inner life; you perceive that the root within is reached, and you see the fruit of the Spirit bud on your own blades. You feel yourself fed by that Spirit, and enabled by Him, with happy rejoicings to scatter anew the seed upon the field.

And all this you see, perceive and feel, not as coming up from yourself, neither as going out from your soul, but as *descending upon your soul.*

It is the rain of the Spirit, that on the day of Pentecost *came down from above,* and now as a river of God spreads itself over the fields of the Spirit.

An unspeakable gift coming to you from your exalted Savior, and given you with God's saints "to the comfort of men"!

VI

"THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE HOLY GHOST BE WITH YOU ALL."

ENTECOST will ever be the day for the church of Christ on earth, not on which she originated, not on which she was conceived, but the day on which as world-church she was born. Up to the days, when Israel appeared among the nations, there truly were believers, there was indeed revelation from the side of God, and from the side of God's children there was worship of the Holy One and Temple ceremonial, but joined together into a visible church they were not. Among Israel the church hid in the shadow of Israel's national existence, but it was not the liberated, the independent, the whole human race embracing, in brief the holy, *catholic,* Christian church.

With equal definiteness therefore both must be confessed: as well on one hand that the beginnings of Christ's church lie in Paradise, as on the other hand that her independent appearance, not for one people, but for the whole world and for the whole human race, only dates from the altogether unique illustrious, the of God appointed Pentecost day at Jerusalem.

As in Paradise the Lord God had first formed man's body from the dust of the earth, and after that had breathed into his nostrils "the breath", or as it stands literally *"the spirit of life"*, that so man should come to full, lively existence, so only by all that had gone before, the body of the church had been formed

in the circle of Jesus' disciples, and on the day of Pentecost the Holy Ghost entered into that body of the church, that so only the church of Christ should be enabled to make her appearance in the world, and to fulfil her mission with respect to the recreation of all things.

We are baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and the root of all confession among Christians is therefore the confession of the holy Threefold fulness. But however deep the heart of this adorable mystery hides from us in the Being of the living God, yet this threeness of the Holy reflects itself, be it in an imperfect way, in the revelation of life. We but stammer, when we relate the Creation more particularly with the Father, Redemption more closely with the Son, and Sanctification more naturally with the Holy Ghost, for every Christian knows and confesses, that all outgoing work of the Divine majesty is common to these three Persons. Nevertheless this *distinction,* provided it never becomes *separation,* gives clearness to our perception. So it may be said, that each season that changes, every year that passes, brings us *a day of the Father,* a day that speaks to us of God the Father as our Creator; even as Bethlehem and Golgotha and the day of Resurrection brings us the witness of *God the Son* and our Redemption. And in this relation, in this series, in this succession, Pentecost is the great and illustrious day, of which already Joel prophecied, which brings us the rich revelation of *God the Holy Ghost,* or our Sanctification.

Pentecost is the day, that declares to us, not merely that powers, workings, influences and motions of the Holy Spirit began to operate in men. For he who deems this to be the case brings to nought all God's work in Paradise, in Abraham's tent and in Israel.

Rather the Holy Scripture shows, and on its authority the church of Christ confesses, that the workings of the Holy Spirit in general went out from the hour of Creation, when it was yet "dark upon the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters (Gen. 1:2); and more yet that already from the days of old the Spirit of God wrought spiritually, that His workings were in all God's saints, yea, that "God put His Holy Spirit in the midst of Israel" (Is. 63:11). Also in the Incarnation of the Word the work of conception was by the Holy Ghost, and at the Baptism the Holy Spirit came down upon the One born of Mary, and before and after His resurrection Christ had imparted to His disciples *"the gift* of the Holy Ghost". Hence it is unthinkable and impossible, that only on the day of Pentecost the workings, the gifts, the influences of the Holy Spirit first went out toward God's saints. Had nothing else therefore taken place on the day of Pentecost, than that the apostles and others who tarried with them in the upper room, had received in richer measure the gifts of the Holy Ghost, nothing illustrious, nothing uncommon nor out of the ordinary would mark that Pentecost-day, nothing that had not taken place before, and has repeated itself every time afterward, century upon century, repeats itself still, and shall repeat itself until the return of the Lord.

He therefore who would understand Pentecost day should carefully consider the word of the apostle John, that "the Holy Ghost (before Golgotha) was not yet *given;* because that Jesus was not yet glorified" (7:39).

Workings, influences, gifts of the Holy Spirit had always been abroad, but now something else, something new would come, and Jesus Himself described

that something new in these words: "that then rivers of living water should flow forth from believers." Of this saying the apostle writes: "This he spake of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive; for thus far the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified."

The more the end was approaching, the more Jesus Himself was filled with that glorious thought, to wit, when, just before His death, He addressed His disciples, He repeated to them three times, that now He was about to go away from them, but that, exalted at His Father's right hand, He would send them, not *gifts* of the Spirit, but the Holy Ghost Himself, *the Comforter,* Who would lead them into all truth, Who would take of His, and shew it unto them.

Thus in clear, perspicuous words, excluding all misunderstanding, Jesus Himself had told His apostles beforehand, that, which was to come on the day of Pentecost, would not be a gift, a power, a working, an influence of the Spirit, but *God the Holy Ghost Himself,* a coming into the world of the third Person of the Holy Trinity, as the second Person of that Holy Triuneness had come into this world in Bethlehem's manger. And when Pentecost belonged to the past, and, under the direction of the Apostles, had gone out into the world, the apostles of Jesus have always declared unto believers, that they, both all together as a church, and personally in their own soul's existence, were a temple of God, an habitation of God in the Spirit, for *that the Holy Spirit dwelt in them.* Yea, this has been declared by the apostles so personally, that they speak to us of the Holy Ghost, as of One, Who in our own heart bears witness with *our* spirit that we are the children of God, and even mention a praying by that Holy Spirit in our own heart with groanings that are unutterable.

The altogether unique, the beforehand unknown, and afterward never repeating itself event of the day of Pentecost, is and remains therefore the descent of God the Holy Spirit, to make His abode in God's temple on the earth, i. e. the mystical Body of Christ, at that time represented by the eleven in the upper room at Jerusalem and whoever were united with them in the love of Christ. And this, not a coming down, presently to leave the church again, but a coming down, to make abode among us, and to remain with us *to all eternity.*

This is what makes the day of Pentecost altogether illustrious, great in the history of the world, that on that day of days the fellowship, the never again departing fellowship of the Holy Ghost is given to regenerate humanity, and that now God the Holy Ghost in Christ as our Head dwells in us as His members.

To the indifferent question of curiosity: where then the Holy Spirit is to be found, and at what point in the visible you can grasp Him,—no other answer remains than the counter inquiry: where and at what point of your body can you lay hold on your own soul? You know, you acknowledge, when in tenderness of love you look at your child, that in that bodily appearance, that stands before you, the soul of your child is present, that your child has a soul and that that soul dwells in that body. But when you are further asked, whether, to lay hold on the soul of your child, you would choose the hand or the breast or the head, you turn away with disgust from so mechanical an inquirer in so holy and tender a matter, as the soul of your child is. And so it has no sense, to ask, where, if the Holy Spirit dwells on earth, He is to be laid hold on in the visible. For the spiritual can not be handled. And who would ever

limit the Holy Spirit in place, Him the omnipresent God, Who only in this sense can indwell in the created, that He chooses thereto a prepared creature as focus from which to cause His beams to go out?

Thus you can, you should confess, that the habitation of the Holy Spirit is in the collective saints on earth, since all these together are the members of the mystical Body of the Lord in this world. That is the boundary. In that circle is the fellowship of saints, because all these are incorporated in the Body of the Lord. Hence you know, that in *that* circle, taken as a whole, and extending itself to all nations and peoples, God the Holy Spirit dwells. But since God and not you limns the heart, and God, but not you knows all His saints in all the world, there can be no mention of an indication of this habitation of God, or of measurements of its length and breadth, and height and depth, and the only question for you is, whether in your place and on the spot, where God the Lord has appointed the place of your habitation, you have come to the fellowship of the saints and live in fellowship with the Holy Ghost.

For this reason also, as often as believers congregate, with the ministry of the Word and Sacraments, the benediction is pronounced: "Grace and peace be unto you from God the Father, through Jesus Christ our Lord, in the *fellowship of the Holy Ghost*", that in the congregation this fellowship with the in-her-midst dwelling Holy Spirit may be perceived and enjoyed. And again at the close of public worship, when every one is on the point of returning home, the blessing is put upon the worshipers: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the *fellowship of the Holy Ghost* be with you all, Amen"; which means, that the going out into the world and the return to one's own home and business

should not become the occasion of the loss of the personal fellowship of the Holy Ghost. Thus there is a twofold fellowship with the Holy Ghost. One for the congregation *as a whole,* and in a special way perceived, felt and enjoyed under the ministry of the Word, of the Prayers and Sacraments. The other the fellowship with the Holy Ghost for the individual *persons,* and for the individual families, which is realized in the work of quiet experience, in personal and family prayer, in the devotions, which in the family or in private, from earnest gratitude for His unspeakable grace, we offer up unto the Triune God.

For this reason at every anniversary day of the Jerusalem Pentecost miracle the question always presents itself again to every child of God, whether he really and truly enjoys and practices this fellowship of the Holy Ghost. Remembrance is by itself already something, and he who at the feast of Pentecost at least allows himself the exertion, to think and meditate upon what happened eighteen centuries ago, has already an advantage over the superficial minded man, who sings along thoughtlessly or perhaps worse yet, hails Pentecost merely as a day of recreation and release from labor and care. To be engaged in thought with the illustrious fact of Pentecost betrays already an interest in what is Holy, a sense of higher things. But this is not enough. The fact itself that transpired on Pentecost day, forbids this. For he who confesses and acknowledges, that on Pentecost God the Holy Spirit came to our world, and chose the church for His habitation, and hence still dwells in the church of Christ on earth, *can* not live along and *must* not go his way, as though he did not count with that descended God, and paid no heed to this indwelling God. To confess, that He is there,

and to act as though He were not there, do not go together. The indwelling of God the Holy Ghost, honestly confessed, puts of itself and inexorably the claim, that you should observe His holy presence, should reverently count with His Divine presence, and seek Him in His habitation, worship, yea, with all the devotion of your soul should honor Him.

Stronger still. You confess that God the Holy Spirit dwells in the mystical Body of Christ and you likewise confess that you yourself, personally, "*are and shall remain eternally a living member*" of that Body of Christ. It is not something therefore outside of you, but an holy reality, in which you yourself are concerned, in which you have a part, and which must show itself to be truth and reality in you,—or else your personal existence and life directly contradict, what with your lips you confess.

Now the fellowship you should have with the Holy Ghost is *twofold.* It is on one hand a fellowship in which the Holy Spirit imparts Himself to you, and on the other hand a fellowship in which you impart yourself to the Holy Spirit. Fellowship is from its very nature always mutual. Hence there is fellowship of the Holy Spirit with you, and fellowship of you with the Holy Spirit.

Yet in the apostolic benediction these two should not be placed one over against the other, and it can not be said, that this benediction, either intends exclusively the fellowship which goes out from the Holy Ghost towards you, nor that it merely views the fellowship, in which you disclose yourself before the Holy Ghost.

He who deems this to be the case, separates what is inseparable. Already among people the disclosure of the heart of one, of itself leads to the opening of the heart of the other. Brightness radiates brightness.

He who gives himself in love, shall in love receive. The stream itself hollows out the bedding, that that stream may the more mightily speed on.

Thus of the "fellowship of the Holy Ghost" you should confess, that, the richer the fellowship which the Holy Spirit grants you of Himself is, the more intimate your fellowship with that Spirit becomes, and that in the same way, the more your heart discloses itself in conscious fellowship before that Spirit, the more deeply and the more effectually the fellowship of that Spirit penetrates in you.

Truly that holy fellowship does not have its beginning with us. Not we call in the Holy Spirit, but He begins by making His abode with us and to reveal Himself to us. The holy initiative is ever from the side of the Holy Spirit, and never goes out from us. But when from the side of the Holy Spirit fellowship has begun, the operation becomes mutual, ever with mutual tension or relaxation, up and down. We are then enticed to the mutual giving of ourselves to the Holy Spirit; and again, the more we give ourselves to Him, the richer from the side of the Holy Spirit revelations go out to us. While again, the child of God that shuts himself out and does not give himself, grieves the Holy Spirit and repels His holy fellowship.

Thus you have to distinguish herewith a threefold spiritual disposition.

On one side the spiritual condition, in which the Holy Spirit has already favored and enriched you with His inward fellowship, the whiles you have not been aware of it, or from your side have not yet responded with real fellowship to it. Especially with children this occurs. It is that spiritual period of our life, which precedes the breaking through of faith, and the conversion of our soul to the Savior.

Another phase is, when you begin to perceive not only the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in His church, but also in yourself personally; and now, vanquished by the love of God, you give yourself to the Holy Spirit; discover His fellowship, and respond to it with fellowship in return; and then blessedly realize, that in that ever deeper and closer fellowship you progress from strength to strength and from glory to glory, delighting yourself in your God and in His blessed nearness, as though melting away in His soul-warming love.

And the third phase which alas, occurs with almost every one in its time, is, that God the Holy Ghost truly made His abode with you and granted you His fellowship, and that you yourself responded to it, and were permitted to go on from grace to grace, but that afterward coolness came in again which extinguished love; that worldly intents came upon you, whereby a veil was drawn between you and the Holy Spirit in your soul; or that by a sudden deep fall in sin you became estranged from the blessed fellowship with your God. Then the Holy Spirit did not cut the tie with your soul, for His love is unchangeable and He never lets go what His hand began. But to your sense, to your consciousness, from your side, it is then become death in place of life, and though then the Holy Spirit still knocks from within, and though He still prays in you with groanings unutterable, from your side fellowship is ended. Then the Holy Spirit truly still dwells in you, if you truly are God's child, but you no longer believe and no longer observe it, and you live, as though you did not know the Holy Ghost; till in the end this phase is broken again by the compassions of your God.

And therefore in this word of blessing: "The fellowship of the Holy Ghost be with you all" there speaks very surely first of all the voice of God, which comforts you, and assures you, that the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, once begun, endures unto eternity, that you might never lose courage, and after every insinking of your faith, you may always again seek refuge with the indwelling Holy Ghost.

But yet, it also implies the warning, the summons in the Name of the Lord, that you from your side should never desist from your fellowship with the Holy Ghost, but rather enrich it, deepen it and make it perfect.

And for this it is necessary, that you strengthen that fellowship in two ways, in your *consciousness* first, and then in the *issues of your life.*

In your consciousness. For it is not good, when you continually forget the Holy Ghost, and devote the thoughts of your soul to the Father indeed and to the Son, but not to the Holy Spirit, do not count with Him, are not engaged with Him, give yourself no clear account of His presence and His indwelling in the congregation and in your own heart and in the heart of your children and members of your family. In brief, when seeking your God, you lift up the eye on high, and lift up the soul to the right hand of the Father where Christ is, but pass the Holy Ghost by, Who dwells in the church and in your own heart, do not address Him, do not call upon Him, and do not consecrate to Him the love of your heart.

It is surely not easy to avoid this. Faith in, confession of, and association with the Holy Ghost, is, if we may so express ourselves, so high, so sacred, so purely spiritual; and our heart inclines so strongly, from afar to boast of a God Who is high above us. The sin of our heart also stands continually in the

way, to really believe, that God Himself dwells in us. But all this is no excuse. You confess, that that indwelling is there. Live then in your heart according to it. And experience, the blessed outcome shall show you, that only he who can find God *near at hand*, i. e. in his own heart, can become aglow with that warm intimacy of love, which by giving love and by receiving love already here on earth renders one blessed.

And together with this, learn to understand, that the Holy Spirit does not seek your fellowship only in your consciousness, but far more still, desires that fellowship in the temper of your heart, in the deepest impulses of your life, in the soul's roots of your inward existence, in brief, in all your tendencies and in all the issues of your heart.

For *deeds* also come into account, and in nothing so much as in *good works* is God the Holy Ghost glorified in His saints. But then those deeds, those works must proceed from the *fellowship of the Holy Ghost*. Then, if we may say so, it must be deeds and works of the Holy Spirit and of your spirit together. Your spirit must meet the Holy Spirit in the inner chamber of your soul, be animated by that Spirit, allow itself to be approached and impregnated, and in the end it must become one Godhuman impulse of holier intention, which exhibits itself in your life, to glorify God the Holy Ghost.

V.

OLD AND NEW YEAR

I

"I AM THAT I AM."

HIS time the evening of the Old year addresses us with special seriousness. Generally it is a sirgle *year,* now a century is completed. Again one hundred years, one after the other has come, been lived through and gone.

A single year is quite long, but we feel that we stand above it. For our own life-time lasts generally much longer. "As to the days of our years," as Moses sang, "they are seventy, and if we are very strong, eighty years." And therefore our feeling-of-self goes out very far above the life of one single year. A year counts little with us. But when it comes to a century it is different. With a century we feel ourselves small. There are almost no more those, who outlive a full century. And a few who did live so long, in the end carried the impression more of a sunken ruin, than of a man flourishing in the strength of his life.

At the close of this century we feel that smallness the more deeply, because in no century has life been more hurried and intense, than in the one that is now ended. Among the forty centuries that lie back of us, there surely never was one which changed, modified and transposed the fashion of the world upon such a gigantic scale as the nineteenth. If they, who a hundred years ago were men in the strength of their days, were able to rise from their graves, and travel across the five continents of the world, they

would scarcely recognize in them the world of their time. In America an entirely new world has arisen, that spreads its wonders from sea to sea, and of the possibility of whose rise then no one thought. Africa, then only known along its coasts, has been discovered as a new part of the world, is travelled across and has joined itself to the intercourse of the world. In Asia, with Japan in the lead, a life has awakened, as of sleeping nations which are about to wake up from a dream of centuries. Australia, then still a group of islands, with all the riddles of curiosity, is now a group of states, ambitious of independence and in more than one respect in advance of age-worn Europe. And in Europe itself, Italy has become united, Germany has appeared as a new world-power, Russia stretching out its broad arms to India and Manchuria. England in extent and worldwide possessions more than doubled.

In addition to this, how greatly the nations have increased in massiveness of numbers. Within our small domain we have more than five millions of people; then not yet the smaller half. And in almost all lands this mass of humanity is ever on the increase. A sea of humanity, as no previous age has known. In London alone there are more souls now, than in earlier times in all England. And for all of them God provided bread, and our God clothed them, and prepared an habitation for them. An always new-creative Almightiness, which causes the human race to fill the earth, and from that earth brings forth food convenient for them.

And among those millions and millions how far different, how far richer a life, than a hundred years ago. How distance has been shortened. Is not the world bound round as with threads of one web, and by rail and steam-boat lines, for all its parts, brought

into inter-communication. What radiancy of artificial light has been ignited, what instruments for the manipulation of matter have been invented, what products of skill have been worked as by magic before our eyes.

God, in His common grace, has strengthened and fortified man, especially in this age, before the face of nature. The *ability* of man of a hundred years ago, with what he is *able* to do now, scarcely lends itself to comparison.

It is, as though humanity, that in former centuries merely advanced heavily step by step, has suddenly awakened, and is now speeding along with giant strides. Nothing, literally nothing continued as it was. Yea, in the face of it all, in a metaphorical sense one might say: Behold, all things have become new.

Here we stand before a riddle.

At the close of the former century anger against God broke loose among the nations, as the world had never known before. The long threatened open apostacy began. The long prepared movement went out from Paris. There was to be a stop put to the Christian religion. Man should henceforth be great, and the majesty of the Lord no more remembered. *Hatred* against God spake from the spirits which then arose, and the, "we will have no more God", was preached as it were from the housetops.

And a century, that *so* began, God has blessed, enriched, crowned, as none of its predecessors. He has marked it as a century above all others, and has given it a name as no century before obtained.

And what is more: in that century which began with opposition against God and open scorn of His Christ, that selfsame God has captured thousands

and thousands of hearts for that Christ and made them kneel in humble faith before the Son of His love, as has not been known since the days of the Reformation. The apostacy has gone on, but over against it a new Christian life has awakened, as the most devout and best, in the age that went before, dared not dream it. Where in that preceding century do you find poets like a Bilderdyk and a Da Costa, who tuned their song high for the Savior of the world? What were our churches of then, compared with what now our eyes behold? When in the former century was such witness borne for God and His Christ in the court rooms of the land, as was the privilege of our century to overhear? What are the few pennies then collected for the Kingdom of heaven, compared with the millions and millions which in this century have willingly and generously been offered for the cause of the Lord? Does not what Christian love then did, disappear as in the shadow, viewed with what now Christian compassion and Christian zeal for missions brought about? How asleep in former centuries all Christian science was, and how awake it now is to render the press also serviceable to Christ.

O, it is true, in increasing measures even, the men of science have set themselves to wrench our Christian faith loose from the foundations, to undermine Christian traditions, and even to tear apart Holy Scripture, robbed of divine authority, and bring it to nought. But, if this grieves you, and offends you, have you then no eyes to see, how God has used this audacity, to compel us to renewed and deeper going investigation, and thus, thanks to this very opposition, has made an entirely new light to shine upon those Scriptures in our behalf, and has enriched and

confirmed our insight and knowledge of His holy truth.

And herein is the grace, and herein are the mercies and compassions of the Lord, that what man had thought for evil, by Him is turned to good, and that He continued so to love the world, for Christ's sake, that He did not deal with her according to her sins, but on the contrary, has overladen her, more than ever in former centuries, with the choicest of His blessings.

When a hundred years ago opposition against God assumed such unholy proportions, it was thought and said by more than one saint: Why does not God destroy the world? Why does He still tolerate it before His face? And this is the answer: There still hid so much glory of God in that creation, a glory which still tarried to manifest itself. The plan of God regarding this world was by no means yet perfected. She stood but at the beginning of her rich development. And the end can not come, before God has brought to light *all* His mightiness, *all* His glory also in this dispensation, to the praise of His holy Name. And be it, that multitudes have neither eye nor ear for this, and that ever greater numbers purposely close their eyes against this, yet the Almightiness of His grace knew how to raise up also in this century men and women, who admiringly viewed this greatness of the Lord in the work of His creation, and have praised God for what His impenetrable majesty wrought.

If this applied to His work of creation, it likewise applied to the treasures which He gave us in His Gospel.

These treasures also had by no means yet been exhausted. The full glory of this had by no means yet been brought to light, in breadth as little as in

depth, and according as the life of our human consciousness has been clarified, our human inventiveness broadened, and our human ability expanded, our Christian faith also, our Christian hope and our Christian love had to set itself to a new and higher exhibition of power.

It was to be a century without God, and more than ever that God Whom men rejected, has shown Himself to be, He alone, *the King of the ages.*

But though for this reason thanks behooves us instead of complaint and a psalm of praise rather than a song of mourning, yet it may not be ignored, that also "the mystery of iniquity", of which Paul speaks in 2 Thess. 2:7, has in this selfsame century developed itself with menacing rapidity.

This hangs together.

As long as God keeps you weak and small and poor, it takes less effort, in hushed humility to bend your knee before Him. But when your means enlarge, and your strength increases, and you begin to feel your might doubly strongly, the temptation to reckon yourself to be your own lord and master, becomes ever more strong in you. That is the history of personal life, that is the history of nations, and that too is the history of humanity.

So long as humanity stood powerless in the face of nature, weak over against worldpower, and trembled in its littleness, it inclined toward worship and silence. But now that God in this century, as never before, gave us power over nature, enriched our knowledge, increased our strength threefold, caused our wealth to increase, and gave our life more in our own hand, the temptation to forget Him, to do it without God, and to cast His cords from us, became thereby the stronger. And before this temptation the generations of this century succumbed.

Man began to be too conscious of himself. He had too much in his own power. He grasped and saw through too much. His wealth of life became too abundant. And so the apostacy went on. Apostacy first of confession in the church, then of the church itself. And when once a man had freed himself from the church, gliding down the fatal steep became ever more imminent: apostacy from the Christ, apostacy from God, apostacy from the moral world-order, apostacy from public honor itself, and at length the privileged group exhibited itself in self-degradation, in which the human is scarcely recognizable, and something wild, something rough, something beastly more and more disfigures life.

We are not blind to so much that is good, beautiful and true, and which is evident even in non-Christian circles. God's common grace does not cease to work wonders. But yet, when we ask after the "god of this age", as Paul calls it, or if you will after the spirit that has marked this century, confess, can it be denied, that the spirit which governed this century, betrayed ever more human pride, demanded the throne for man, and thus of itself had to mark itself by the loosening of holiest ties, which were the honor of our human society.

And yet, notwithstanding this bold apostacy, and in spite of that unholy spirit, which captured the heart, humanity remains God's humanity, and His working in the underground of the heart of the nations comes every time again so gloriously to light ..... Is it not remarkable, that a century that began with a Voltaire, ends with payment of homage to a Cruger as a man of mightiest and most impressive proportions, who proclaims in the hearing of all, that his confidence is the God of the fathers.

True, this does not appease our offended feeling; and what child of God shall not be offended, while the keynote of the world's life is continually sounded against God and against His Anointed, against His commandment and against His Holy Spirit. But yet, even this should and can not blind our eye to the work of grace, that in spite of its apostacy, God has continued in this century. It can not be thought for one moment, that the century which presently passes away, has been one without God and that God has not been in it. Your mood should not be merely that of sadness because of religious apathy, but should likewise be that of joy in the adoration of His high appointment. Us too He has advanced this century, made richer, girded with strength, and by the deeds of His Almightiness He has gladdened our heart. He has been great, continued great, yea, He has shown Himself still more mighty in His greatness, in this very century now nearly gone, in the measure in which man has willed to put himself in His place, and has aimed to cause the greatness of our God to be forgotten.

The vision Moses saw in the burning bush retains also here its significance. Stalk and leaf in that grove of shrubs were aflame with fire. It all seemed one self-consumption. And yet they were not consumed. Glorious image of what presently God announced in His holy Covenant Name: *Jehovah*, I am that I am. Whatever may restlessly turn and be consumed, I your God remain the same, with Me is no shadow of turning. "As a garment it shall all wax old, and the ages also as a vesture shall be changed, but Thou, O Lord, art the same and Thy years shall have no end" (Ps. 102:26, 27).

That is the holy laughter of Him Who is throned

above years and centuries. When the peoples imagine a vain thing, and the kings of the earth take counsel together against Him and His Anointed, saying: "Let us break the bands of God asunder and cast His cords from us," then He Who dwells in the heavens, laughs, and He, Who holds the ages in His hand, has them in derision, saying: "Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion, and His seed shall endure for ever" (Ps. 2).

Whether the wise of the earth and the mighty ones among the peoples stir themselves and rise up against Him, He goes on restfully every morning and every evening with His divine plan, and renders even that commotion and that apostacy serviceable to His holy purpose, and that unchangeable purpose is: to glorify Himself as God and make His creature share His joy.

And therefore our soul beats no retreat from fear at what is to come, even when presently the new century is ushered in, because our heart knows, that that same God Who was King in the century that went by, shall also be what He is in the century that comes, and in that century too He shall reveal Himself as God Almighty. Years hasten on, centuries come and go, but our God remains the same, in Whose hand the heart of kings is as the rivers of water, and with Whom the nations are counted as shall dust of the balance and as a drop of a bucket.

Be in you but the humble prayer, in the years of the new century, as many as God has appointed you, to be found among His saints, whose joy it is to be an honor to His holy Name. Would God's people but understand, that, where apostacy increases hand over hand, in like measure among His chosen people the deeper seriousness of life must increase, the full

readiness of consecration, the heroism of faith, to come up for the honor of their God. Strength here must stand over against strength. In the world increasing strength of self-importance, of pride and the exhibition of power, and over against this in the circles of the redeemed increasing strength of mountain-removing faith, of purity of soul and of a love that shrinks back from no sacrifice.

So let there be zeal for God in you personally, zeal in your family, zeal for God in your entire generation, in your environment, in your circle of life. One host, that advances under the banner of the Lord, that, whatever the coming century may bring, they may stand faithful and true to His Holy Name.

The old die away, to the younger comes the turn of shouldering the task. And as from the century that now passed away, the names sound in our ears, inspiring us with courage, of the men of God who then stood in the front ranks, so from among those who now are young, the men must presently come forward, whose names, when the new century shall be ended, shall be rehearsed, with inspiring echoes in the heart, to the succeeding generation.

Let every one of us therefore turn in upon himself. To us also God gave of the century that went, such a considerable part to live. Dark upon the way of that century behind us lie the many spots of sin, which He covered over in His great compassionateness. But on that way behind us here also lie the deeds of God's grace to our soul; the loveliness and trials He apportioned unto us; all that for our training, He has done to our soul. And therefore from the century that went, must be brought into the century that comes, the fruit of that grace, in ripened faith, in formed character, in gains of self-control and love.

And what is this gain with you, what is the fruit which *you,* to the glory of God, into that new century *bring with you?*

Some fruit there will surely be. God never works for nought. But who of us does not complain, that that fruit might have been so much riper, so much more glorious, if we, stilled as the weaned child, had ever been near unto God?

But, what is done takes no turn, and you would double your guilt before God, if in so serious a moment, as the transition from one century into another, you did not take hold of yourself, sit in judgment upon yourself, and, quickening the seriousness of life in your soul, you did not equip yourself, in the new century, to place yourself more unreservedly at the service of your God.

Believe it, apostacy will go on, seduction will assume a more crafty form, temptation in the century to come shall become still more overwhelming. In the end the foundations of the earth shall begin to shake before your eye. In that respect the century that went shall be holy compared with what the new century carries in its womb. Has not the Lord Himself spoken of days to come, which shall be so terrible, that, unless they were shortened, even the elect would succumb? Let then for you also the hour draw near, to gird on the full armour of God, and to stand in the strength of your Lord. Then, and then only, will you be invincible, and this passing century will close with the jubilation of worship in your heart: Now unto the King eternal, invisible, incorruptible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

II

"HE RETURNETH AGAIN TO HIS EARTH."

HE *end* of the year, that has come again, exhorts every man to think of *his own end.* The *Old year* is an impressive *Memento mori,* i. e. "Remember, that once you too must die!" wherewith the eternal God makes His children of men start up for a moment out of their thoughtlessness.

There are two evils, which you should avoid. One is of *always,* and the other is of *never* thinking of your death.

Always to have death before your eyes, dulls the spirit, makes your freshness fade, and unhumanizes you as man. Then you live under constant fear; you can not set your heart and attention to your daily work; and even your devotional life obtains the false fold of sheer fear of corruption and doom.

It is indeed a *grace,* that we are enabled, for the greater part of our life to put off from us the thought of our end, and with glad hearts to enjoy with relatives and loved ones, what our Father in heaven apportions to us of the delights of life.

Always to think of death would be no life upon earth. To enjoy his walk, the walker must not think all along the way of the door at which presently he shall knock. There would be no sailing the sea if all along the journey sailors stood on the look-out for land. And he who already at sunrise, and during all the hours of day, would look for sunset, would not enjoy half of the light of heaven which God provides for us.

In monasteries and hermitages it has been seen what that going to sleep and getting up with a skull on one's table leads to, and more than one irascible among us is as a beacon at sea, to warn us away from this dangerous cliff.

But know well, that the second evil is yet worse. He who never thinks of his end, makes of his life a play; banishes wilfully the seriousness from his heart; and is not unlike the traveler, who, in the waiting room of a station between, takes delight in food and drink, and forgets that the journey extends further.

Never to think of the end is a sinful misuse of the grace, that enables us to put the thought of our end from us. For that very grace of forgetfulness should bear the costly fruit, that not *too* often, but at particular times we think of it *the more seriously*, and with our whole soul enter into it, in advance live through our own end, and in the midst of our years undergo the tremendous impression of dying.

Our human disposition brings with it, that grave-diggers and undertakers are often entirely callous toward death. What one *always* sees, in the end one no more sees *at all*. While on the other hand the impression is deepest, most penetrating and overwhelming, when at a single time we are arrested with all the tension of our spirit by the thought of such an awful something as our death.

And this is what Old-year's night, the messenger of God's eternity to your heart, comes to do.

There is *rotation* in the year. The year forms a *circle*. Thus it turns, even as when you draw a circle, again to its startingpoint. It began with the first of January, and see, when presently the twelve strokes

from city or village steeple have been sounded, you are back at that first of January again.

And so says the Holy Spirit in Psalm 146, man too turns back *to his startingpoint and beginning.*

He who is not familiar with the original Hebrew, here needs a brief explanation. The name of a human being in Hebrew is *Adam,* and the name of the earth is *Adama.* Thus the psalmist alludes to the fact that *Adam* is come from the "Adama" (earth) and that at his death he *returns* to this "Adama".

Thus when it says: "Man turns again *to his earth*" or literally: "adam turns again to his adama", it means: From the earth, *your* earth, O, child of man, were you taken and come, and to *your* earth at your end presently you again return.

As with the year, so in your life there is a *circle*-course, a movement as in a *circle,* which turns back into its starting point. With earth it began with you and with earth presently you end. Dust from dust and presently returning to the dust of the earth, itself again to become dust of that earth.

By that saying: "Man returneth again to his earth" (Ps. 146:4), the Scripture humiliates you so deeply. For though you may tread that grey dark earth slightingly under foot, and turn away from a dug grave as soon as the oppressive odor of earth comes up to you, it still remains as Moses wrote: "From that *dust of the earth* the Lord formed man". And every graveyard can teach you so seriously and eloquently, that, however finely fashioned and beautiful and healthy your body may be, once, God alone knows already how soon, it turns back to that dust of the earth, to become earthmatter again and disappear in earthy, rank earth-exhalation.

There is still much that is glorious about you now, were it but the glow and animation that beam

from your eye; but presently all that glory shall prove to have been as a flower of the field. Then the wind makes itself heard across the country; her stalk breaks; her leaf withers; and one knows and finds even her place no more.

So die the old, sated with days; but so also many a man is carried out in the strength of his life; young men and young women who have known no midday-sun of life, fill long rows in our cemeteries; and as the scythe mows the ears of corn, so mowed the scythe of death our little darlings, which faded early, before they had yet sucked the full breast dry.

And this year again, that now comes to its close, how many thousands upon thousands have been carried out, who a year ago at this time, when dying was talked of, thought of every one else sooner than themselves.

And now too, how many there are, who while reading this our word of admonition, can not possibly imagine, that it might come *to them*, and who, when the year again is past, will no longer be on earth.

It can be *your* lot who reads, it can be the lot of him who writes this.

Man goeth to his eternal home.

Pilgrims are we, but who, at a moment when least we think of it, suddenly can face eternity.

Reader, if it came to you this newly beginning year, would you be *prepared?*

For, unless God is gracious unto you, nothing will avail, you return again *to your earth*, and all joy remains cut off from you for ever.

Place yourself before the mirror, and that whole

man, whom you see reflected in that mirror there, is nothing but *sheer earth.*

When God fashioned your unformed substance in your mother's womb, says the psalmist in Psalm 139, you were curiously wrought in *the lowest parts of the earth.* All your mother had, to fashion you, was taken from the dust of the earth. And with your growth, your body increased by the food you took; in your milk and in your bread, and what other food was given you, it was all *dust of the earth* transposed by God's omnipotent power into bread and milk.

To that earth you return again, because it is *your* earth. That is to say, all there is of you came from that earth and from dust of that earth was fashioned, and thus, as soon as this fashioning power lets go of you, everything in you must dissolve again; and then there comes out of it, what there was in it; dust *from* the earth and *for* the earth.

Nothing but disdain and horror.

O, the grave is so disagreeably somber. And whether friends place wreaths upon it or plant flowers around it, avails you not, when in the earth you are engaged in becoming dust of the earth again. No dead person sees those wreaths, and the fragrance of those flowers he no more drinks in.

And therefore the people of the Reformation were correct when they would have nothing to do with wreaths on the casket and with flowers on the grave.

No, you do not break the terrible seriousness of the graveyard with your roses and immortelles. Let barrenness and dryness remain upon our graves. Sacred symbolism of what it really is in those graves.

"For we consume away in Thy displeasure" (Ps. 90:7).

Oh God, when we have come to the end of our

life here on earth, and must go down into the grave, let our hope be in Thee!

No immortelles and no forget-me-nots, but only the Word of God belongs on the grave.

For in that dark moment it will *come to God* with you.

If God then does nothing for you, the earth will have you. Then you are booty and prey of the earth. Resistance is not possible. The earth will do with you as she pleases. And when the earth shall have done her pleasure with you to the end, vile corruption shall for ever overtake you, and shall bring upon you underneath that earth, in the abyss, a destruction from which no soul has ever yet returned, to tell us, how it there is, but of which Jesus has whispered to us, that there a worm gnaws that never dies, and that there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. A place of outer darkness; with a fire in the smoke of that darkness that can never be quenched; a dreadful state full of contempt and horror.

O, do not die like this, whoever you may be, young or old, who might read this, and not to die like this, take no rest until you know, that in your dying God shall perform an act of grace also upon you.

Here an uncertain expectation avails you nothing. To an unfounded hope your little boat can have no anchorage amidst the terrible breakers of death.

No, no, you need *assurance, certainty,* in that dreadful hour not to fear and tremble, but to rest in the faithfulness of your God.

Your humiliation is deep, be it so. You must return to dust, go back to your earth. Everything there is of you now, your blood and nerves, your flesh and heart will presently be taken away from

you. Nothing will remain of you but a few dry bones, if even these shall not be ground to dust. Even this uttermost of self-degradation may not be spared you. Once you must lie before your God altogether helpless, as creature altogether resistless before that so often scorned Creator; and it will be terrible, if then, without mediating grace, you must fall into the hands of the living God.

But now listen, how the saints of God do sing!

They cry: "Death, where is thy sting, grave where is thy victory!" (1 Cor. 15). They jubilate: "I know, that my Redeemer liveth, He shall stand (keep watch) over my dust, and from out my flesh I shall see God!" (Job 19:26). In an exalted mood another sings: "I have a desire to depart, and to be with Christ!" (Phil. 1:23). And still another: "Thou wilt shew me the path of life (Ps. 16:11), and afterward Thou shalt receive me in glory" Ps. 73:24). And still again another glories: "I shall satisfy myself with Thy likeness when I awake" (Ps. 17:15).

Confess, does not such jubilation arouse your jealousy? Would it not be worth to you more than gold in the hour of your death, if in the midst of your dying pains you were able so to glory, so to jubilate, knowing that neither height nor depth, neither death nor hell, can separate you from the love of God, which is assured you in Christ Jesus?

And the secret of such jubilant language is so simple.

Also a Job, a Paul, a David, they have all turned back to their earth and dust has consumed their beauty; but their God had come upon them in grace, and had planted in them a germ of eternal life, where the dust of the earth could not reach it, yea, which only, after the dust of the earth had delivered

them from the body of death, has gloriously sprung up in the blessed atmosphere of the heavens.

These men *believed,* they believed *in the* Christ; nothing more; nothing different. A voice cried: "that whosoever believeth in the Son, shall not perish, but have everlasting life." And by that faith it came into their soul. Not first in their dying, but long beforehand, while they yet lived. And so while they were alive they felt long in advance, that when their dust went to their earth, God would surely perform the act of grace upon them, to translate them into His heaven.

This made them glad. This enticed from their breast a note of eternal jubilation. And from that faith they have led the song for the whole church of Christ, of "Death, where is thy sting, and hell, where is thy victory."

And, praise be to God, there are still many such also in our land. You find a few in every city and in every village, who still sing this after the saints.

For to their soul also God has done great things.

They lay not first in their dying, but long before their death "entangled in the bands of death, as the fear of hell deprived them of all comfort". And from the tumultous distress of their soul the prayer went up on high: "Oh, Lord, save thou my soul!" And, God heard. He is worthy of my love. "The Lord is great, gracious and all just. And to such as pray our God is full of compassion".

Alas, most people now seek to make this superficial. That after death one enters heaven, seems to many people a matter of course. Especially the dear, inoffensive, honest people.

Nothing is needed but *faith.* Well, they are not

unbelievers. What, preacher of the mercies of God, what more would you have!

And yet, with this the church of God is not content.

If it were so light a matter, if the way were so smooth, why should Jesus have declared, that the gate is straight and the way narrow, and that few there be that find it!

The proof to the sum turns out differently. For you readily observe, that these dear and not unbelieving people rather do not talk about that "turning back to their earth" and that the jubilant triumphing over grave and death is utterly *foreign* to them.

Oh, the difference speaks so loudly.

Where there is *genuine* faith, the outlook upon eternity is sure and certain. One might die today, or tomorrow, and any moment God might call would be good and welcome. Yea, then there is delight and love, already now to anticipate that glory when we shall see Him as He is, and therefore be ourselves like our Jesus.

But when it does not go deeper than the surface and plastered wall exhibits its beautiful white, then underneath all this refined exterior there stirs a certain unrest; you miss that truthfulness of tone; then one talks of everything else rather than of those awful eternities; and when it comes to dying, eternity is entered on a *guess*, with a *prayer* that God might yet be gracious unto their soul.

Judge for yourself, for such imaginative halfness is not this matter of eternity too serious; and do you not mislead yourself and hold your soul back, by not penetrating to deeper, more fundamental truth?

It is now Old year!

The year ran long, as though there would be no

end to it. And see, that end *is* here. And how quickly it came and overtook you.

And so it shall be with your life.

That too lasts seemingly so long. Sometimes it is as though no end is visible on the horizon. And yet the end of it shall once come upon you as a thief in the night.

Watch therefore and pray!

Do you not hear, how the Lord calls even you!

Our times are fraught with danger. Life is so busy and overbusy. Everything chases and drives. As flakes whirl along in the snowstorm, day by day our restless lives whirl past us. Impressions crowd out one another. And the moments in which a human soul may restfully collect itself, to be alone with her God, oh, you find them so rare.

And God the Lord knows this, and he also knows, how great a danger this presents to His children, to wander off with the rest, and to be hurled away in the whirlwind of modern life. So He enriches and deepens and multiplies His grace. And so the child of God makes his way.

But woe to you, if on the ground of this you take your ease and go on in sin.

Rowing against the stream is rather your heavenly calling, and in lieu of struggling against that chase of the snowstorm, the pressure of the love you have for your God.

And therefore let the people of the Lord for the sake of their own soul and the soul of their children learn to understand the signs of the times.

However greatly the times have changed, and temptation has increased and pleasure has become the supreme object of pursuit, and lightheartedness has obtained the upper hand, *death remains,* and

now as for twenty and thirty centuries, "our days are threescore years and ten and if we are very strong four score years, and they continue to be mostly labor and sorrow."

However much the apostles of a very easy Gospel may seek to tempt our souls, He, Jehovah our Lord, *is* what He *was* and what He *shall be* and His righteousness can not be broken, and *His judgment comes.*

Yea, however mighty man's hand may have become over the forces of nature and able to control all sorts of disease and unite pole to pole, that might of man's hand has never reached *across the boundary of eternity,* and the: "Thus far and no further" remains on the part of God the call to our century also.

Praise be to God, that to this we may add, that however high the waters of unrighteousness and of opposition against God may have risen in our age, yet now as for twenty centuries and more His Faithfulness endures and His Compassion does not grow old.

O, with the return of this year to its startingpoint might that Faithfulness and that Compassion of our God be the comfort of His people everywhere.

And when presently more than one "turns back unto his earth", let the refreshing of his deathbed be the sweet remembrance, of how by the seriousness of Old year's night God the Lord took hold of his soul, and how before the Presence of God he sank away forevermore to find Him!

III

"WHO DECLARES THE END FROM THE BEGINNING."

LREADY the Preacher of ancient days in Jerusalem's gate told us, that: "Everything has its appointed time. A time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to pluck up that which is planted" (Eccl. 3). And now that by God's forbearing patience another year has run its course, and the Lord has not destroyed us, together with this whole world of unrighteousness, neither stormed it away in His wrath, but still maintained it and still overshadowed it with His compassion, it behooves us and every creature, that was permitted to overhear the call of his God, to pause a moment on the way, and at the *close* of this year to think back to its *beginning* and of what from this beginning separates the end.

This year now closing had its appointed time. From the hand of the Eternal it was born, and that same hand of Almightiness presently takes hold of it, to turn it back into its nothingness. This year, too, was born, but this year, too, must die. This year, too, is planted by God, but, after a few moments, is plucked up again by that same God from the flowerbed of the years. And then it is said to be past, but it is not therefore past; for, as a plant that was plucked up, yet left its working and fruit behind, so there still *remains* of such a year of life the well-nigh incalculable harvest of what God's faithfulness wrought, and of what our guilt has sinned, therein.

We have lived through this year, we have crept

through it, and have struggled through it, but from its first beginning God Almighty has *ruled* it. Before that year came to us, God the Lord held it in His holy hand. From that hand it came forth, to enter into our life. It came not of itself, but God sent it. And when it began, the Lord knew it and everything this year involved; and of this year, too, when it went forth, He said to His angels: "My counsel shall stand and I will do all My good pleasure". This year was then still merely a seed, that only just began to germinate, but God knew every branch and every twig, each leaf and every flower, that should bud thereon: every gust of storm-wind which would afflict us therein; and every poisonous insect that would creep up along its stalk. Yea, to this year, too, applied what through Isaiah the prophet (46: 9) the Lord had spoken concerning His divine counsel: *"I am a God Who declares the end from the beginning."*

To us such a year is a dead force, which rolls one grain of sand after another towards us every morning at our awaking, or, if you will, a cloud floating over us, from which day by day drop after drop is sprinkled down upon our lifeway; but to God such a year is *alive*. As one mighty whole it stood sculptured out from the beginning before Him. In His counsel such a year had to fulfill a rôle; according to His holy plan it had a calling, to which it was bound to respond; it was a messenger sent out by Him to this world and its nations and its children of men; sent forth also to your home, and in that home to the personal life of your own heart.

We stood before it blind. We did not know that strange year, which had just announced its arrival, and, with the veil before its face, did not allow us to surmise what it carried in its womb. So our hope of good struggled with the anxious fear of an outpouring

of God's anger. For this is the striking part of it, that with the dying away of a worn-out and the birth of a new year, the wave-beat of eternity sounds through our troubled heart, and those voices of the eternal waters make us, unholy creatures, afraid before the holinesses of our God.

But now we know the year. It finished its course. It grew up and flourished in its branches which, now shorn of leaves and withered, stands again before us as an image of death. And before again another year is released from God's eternity, our look turns backward therefore for a moment, once more to view that lived-through and withered year in its somber form before the face of God.

Not that God the Lord made it *somber,* for His faithfulness was there every morning; His mercifulness was that year also mighty upon them that feared Him; and every night and morning His divine compassion was new. The sum-totals of all God's kindly blessings can not be estimated. Theirs is no number. But sometimes the year was somber, insomuch as we had to live through it; insomuch as the stream of its waters had to flow through our heart; and because every morning and every evening our heart mingled in that clear, deep stream the outpouring of our inward sickness and unholiness. For who, in looking back upon such a year, can be satisfied with himself? Who can say: "This year the plant of my soul has borne a rich gift, a work full of God?" Who can boast: "This year now passed I lay in grateful worship, O my God, as a pure offering upon the altar of Thy holiness!" No, the best of us do not dare to bring this to his lips; and the most godly among God's saints kneels rather the most lowly in self-accusation and in hushed humility at that altar of his God.

For what has such a life been a whole year long, in

your home, in your city or village, among your people and in your native land, yea, upon all the earth before your God! Did not everything live on and on, as though there were no God in heaven, and to forget God and not to think of God. And to substitute one's own will and counsel for the counsel and will of the Lord, was but the natural utterance of our sinful existence! Have there this year also not again murders been committed and robberies, have people not slandered and lied, cursed and blasphemed, envied and hated, and in every way delighted in sin, as though there were no law on the part of God appointed for our human life! And it is true, in the circles of God's people it was different. There was praise and a song, there upon the knees thanks were given and prayers offered. But even then, in our circle how far below the holy ideal that beckoned us did we remain, and beneath the "following after as beloved children", to which God called us! So much richer talent was entrusted to us, and how empty and poor was not the larger part of the fruit which we brought unto God! God was to rule as King in the midst of His baptized and redeemed children, and how innumerable were the bitter moments, that self-rule seemed more dear to us than to be ruled of God. Yea, worse still, the moments that the throne of Satan seemed erected again in our heart. Richer unfolding ever and wealthier fruit of spiritual life there should be among God's children, and how the gold proved again and again to be tarnished and all wisdom in Christ stunted and all development of more grace foiled. A year is so long, and how much farther it should have advanced us on the way! And now, where were you with your faith when this year began, and at what part of the way does its end find you? A whole series of sins stood on the program of your spiritual struggling, to be crucified, dead and

buried; and now, look around you, examine your heart, and ask yourself, with what scornful glee they still have free play in you, full of evil, vital strength. God did not take you away yet; life is still yours. But what shall a new year avail you when, after having carried you twelve months with equal lack of purpose, equally poor as to fruit and equally rich in new guilt before God, it sinks back into eternity?

And, therefore, when in those impressive moments, which the change of the circle of years brings you, you look back to what is behind and forward into the veiled future, do not drift on the stream of your feeling, but man yourself to brave, heroic, courageous seriousness. And call upon the Holy One, that He may atone that year you have sinned away in the blood of the Lamb; that He may awaken you and enrich you with double portions of His grace, and be it then by bitter chastisements, be it by tender mercies, draw you away from the evil world and entice you unto Himself.

Days are becoming more and more serious, the future outlines itself so menacingly in the gathering clouds on the horizon. A century ago the blood of the nations in Europe was poured out in rivers, and the seers of our days continually speak of a coming catastrophy, which in dreadfulness and bitter desolations will far outrun the cruelty of the first Revolution. Everything arms itself to the teeth, and every connoisseur feels that there is no name imaginable for the terrors that await us, when once—O, God, be it late—those millions upon millions of soldiers, with their inexhaustible supplies of instruments of destruction, in contempt of death shall storm loose upon one another.

And were even this but the worst! But you well know, far worse and more dreadful is the wrenching loose of the foundations of our entire social system;

that subversion of the ordinances of God, on which He has founded our human life; and that rousing and wilful outpouring of the viols of hatred and vengeance, wherewith one part of the children of men is set up against the other; now as yet held back behind the bars of law and saber, but which makes you shiver at the thought of what it once shall be, when finally the bars bend and break, and it shall become one Cain and Abel among all peoples and nations, and in our own dear fatherland and in the city of our habitation. In fact, no one of us makes for himself even a weak representation of the terrible times that are at hand, and of the dreadful things which we or our children shall live to see.

And can you say, that our generation has any idea of this, and seriously prepares itself for these dreadful things? Is there a careful avoidance of what can hasten that outbreak? Is there activity all day long, in ever wider circles to introduce antidotes against this poisoning of human life? Is courage faithfully nursed to be able to remain standing in the day of vengeance? And can you say, that children are brought up as a generation destined to face such evil days and so dreadful an issue of history? Alas, everything is sport and play, and shouts and sings, and ignites bonfires and dances, laughing on the verge of the most awful abyss. Fire stirs and smoulders underground where your house stands, and there is no one to carry water to extinguish it. Even among the Lord's people there is no perception of this and no presentiment of how, when that awful catastrophy comes, madness shall break loose against the "pious" in particular, and the martyrcrown shall glisten again. Sunken away in dissensions, eager for honor and spoil, that more sacred circle lacks that higher note of life which, on the march to the field of battle, must inspire the real hero.

And yet, voices of admonition are not wanting. In all sorts of manners and ways God calls from on high to warn you. From the beginning He declares also now the end. He calls on you to give heed to the signs of the times. He drew in His Word the fixed lines, after which the development of the history of the nations shall run, and He raised up men, who all through this century have warned you, and have told you what is to come. And when this voice did not reach you, He visited you with adversity. He lessened the supply of your prosperity, in a small oppression and bitter injury He gave you the foretaste of what awaits you. No, the conflagration will not break out suddenly without you have been warned. Long beforehand the sparks crackle and you hear a sound as of smouldering fire. At once something cracks and shakes and breaks, so that involuntarily you start up and scent treason; and he who in sensual pleasure and fickle song did not stop up his ear to this divine warning, observes what is approaching, and realizes how closely the evil is already at the heels.

Oh, that the ear of the spirit might be opened wide and the Lord's people might become listening, to observe how the Lord is making His approach with the terrible voice of His judgments. Those judgments can no more be averted. Things must go through the breakers, if we shall ever reach a safer haven. A hundred years ago the nations in France's Revolution openly attempted to take off the crown from the head of God and assail the honor of His Anointed. They broke the bands and unravelled the cords. And when Paris took the lead in this, no voice went forth of horror and indignation from the bosom of the other nations, but from almost every nation echoes rose of that wild song of liberty, and *without* God *against* God, by self-will and self-choice, after one's own desire

to refashion life has now for a whole century long been the parole of the peoples. It is true, terrible was the tyranny of the rulers of that day, and a change should and was bound to come, but this was the sin of the nations at the time, that they sought deliverance from this oppression and the breaking up of that tyrannical yoke not in the way of humbling themselves before God, but in arrogant defiance of their God undertook by insurrection, with their own hand, to secure a better future for themselves.

And, therefore, to avert this is no more possible. Now the nations *must* run their own chosen way, and the end of that way *must* be, that instead of in Paradise they must arrive at the gate and the terrorization of hell. Therein must the honor of God be avenged, and the foolishness of man be mocked. It must, and once it shall be shown unto all the powers in heaven and on earth, that he who undertakes to lift up his hand against his God, injures not his God, but himself.

This must come to pass, for "from the beginning God has declared the end", and has announced to every child of man, that "Whoever should eat of that tree, should *die*". The wages of sin can never be other than *death*. And the peoples of Europe can find at the end of their deeply sinful way nothing else than *death* in their social and *death* in their domestic and *death* in their political life.

Yea, if it were still thinkable in Europe, what was once seen in Nineveh, that, with kings and princes and wise men in the lead, whole nations would humble themselves in sackcloth and ashes and in despair of heart before the Lord Sabaoth, even now the turning away of evil might yet come and wrath be averted. But he who is no stranger in the Nineveh of our days, and opens his ear to listen, and to catch the voices that

are abroad among both higher and lower classes, well knows that the nations and peoples of Europe are too far gone to come to such a concerted action. There is no trace, no hint of such a disposition of spirits present. And if in some circles a certain tendency becomes evident to hold the christian religion high again, is it not frequently in the faith of the lower classes to seek a safeguard for the protection of his possessions rather than by devoting oneself to the Lord to arouse oneself to the glory of His Name!

And, therefore, we may not hesitate. We must prepare our souls for the dreadful days to come, and even realize the possibility that already this year, which we now enter upon, may bring us something of that awful catastrophy. Let every one put away the folly and the lightsomeness from his heart and from his lips, now that the Lord sets Himself to examine every one's path and every one's deeds. Let him that ever yet halted between the Lord and Mammon, break with the sinful amphibiousness of his whole life and convert himself to the Lord his God. Let no one of you be overtaken this year by death while you with your lamp without oil lie asleep on the threshold of eternity. That all God's children in this good land might cease from envying one the other, and doing each other injury, and that as an altogether unique people they might join themselves together in heartfelt, brotherly love, that for the sake of holding off the evil day, they may strengthen each other's hands.

When presently the twelfth stroke of the clock shall have sounded, we stand again at the opening of a new year. For that year also God appoints the *beginning*. He plants it. His divine hand commits the germ of it to the life of the world. But likewise His is the knowledge of what the *end* of the year shall bring us. Whether for you, or for one of your dear ones, it shall

be the last year of life; or whether for you or for one whom your soul loveth, it will be the year of conversion and of coming unto life; whether roses will be strewn upon your way, or thorns on the stalk shall smart and wound you. He knows all the trouble that this year shall burden your heart. He has filled the cup of bitterness and of suffering, that this year shall be put to your lips. But He also holds in His beneficent hand all blessings that shall come to you, all the abundance that shall be your portion, all the blessed comfortings that shall refresh your heart. And, therefore, do not fear and neither be afraid, but now, at the change of years, in childlike confidence grasp the faithful hand of that Father Who is in heaven; and with that Father Who is in heaven this year also will be to your good and to your benefit. *All* things, even your deep fall into sin, must work together for your good, provided you know but one thing, which is, that you love your God.

What then may come, be it death or life, be it hunger or sword, be it the strong hand of powers and authorities, this year, too, it shall be the blessed experience of all God's children that neither height, nor depth, nor things present, nor things to come, nor any other creature shall be able to separate them from that almighty love of our God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. So be it!

IV

"IT IS DONE."

NCE the end of *all* things shall be reached, *all* things shall be ended, that in the last judgment Christ may solemnly bring to a close the whole history of mankind; and then there waits for those, who *live to see* that youngest day, sensations and terrorizations, under which one would almost say, every human heart must succumb. And yet, not only do we move along unobservedly toward that striking end, but on the evening of the Old year, i. e. on New Year's Eve already premonitory pangs go through our soul of what on that day of days shall perplex the mind of man. Not so much with the eye to the future, as looking back on what lies behind, something of that same painful feeling sometimes takes hold of us now, with the passing of another whole year of life, which will bring regret and terror to the heart of all mankind, at the sound of what God's Herald shall then proclaim. "It is done."

And He said unto me, so we read in the last chapter but one of Holy Scripture, and He said unto me: *"It is done.* I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. And I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things."

Altogether something different from the: "It is finished" of Golgotha. That "It is finished" pointed to the Mediatorial work of Reconciliation and Satisfaction. "Finished" was then everything that God's eternal law demanded from the fallen sinner, and in

his stead from the Mediator, that the righteousness of God might remain unspotted and inviolate.

When that was done and had been struggled through to the end, Jesus in dying cried out: *"It is finished."* But here an altogether different note is sounded. On the evening of that youngest day it shall be: *It is done.* The end of all things is come. What is past is past. The day of grace is ended. As the verdict stands, so the verdict remains. As in God's holy counsel is was foreknown, so it has come to pass according to His plan. Now is the turning-point, at which time for ever flows out into eternity. All that was to come, all that was to constitute the history of all human life, of every child of man, of all mankind, it has now been, it is past; it is irrevocably cut off. *It is done.*

That we have the right, in a relative sense, to apply that solemn outcry: *It is done,* to what lies back of it, appears from Rev. 16:17, where, with the appearance of an angel we overhear the same expression: And the seventh angel poured out his viol into the air, and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, saying: *"It is done."*

What shall then be done, is not done at once, but in the course of years and centuries, and in that course of years and centuries there are periods of time, divided by great points of rest. Transition periods in your personal life, when great decisions in your personal existence take place, and you pass over from one condition into another, from your youth into your adult life, from your parental home out into the world, from your sense of sin into your consciousness of grace, and so much more.

So there are transitions, and thereby periods of time, which divide not only your life, but the life of

all mankind, and one of these is the passing from year into year.

Not an imaginery division, but one ordered of God already in Paradise for our race, when He set the sun for a sign in the heavens, made the position of sun and world changeable, and made the point at which sun and world stand in the same position again, to be a restpoint in our human life.

The transition from the old into the new year comes from God, comes from His Divine firmament, and it is the position of our earth to the sun, which makes us pass over from year into year.

So God Himself makes division in our human life. He Himself has willed, that on the day of the old year we should pause a moment on our way, to look back upon what lies behind. And now, at that backward look "that great voice out of the temple of heaven" enters into our soul, saying: "It is done." This year also sinks back into the past. What has been lived through in it, can no more be recalled; nothing more of it can be changed; *It is done,* and remains, as it is, a part of your life, a chapter in your *life's history.*

It is done, all that from eternity God had intended, to bring about in that year now past. Even now His counsel stood, and He has done all His good pleasure.

There were thousands and tens of thousands, whom by Himself He had intended, in this past year by death to take out of life, and all these became sick unto death, or perished by some catastrophy, and the grave received their mortal remains.

Together with this there were ten thousands and more, of whom by Himself He had intended, that in this past year they should see the light of day, and

all these were conceived in sin, they have been carried under the heart, they have been born of woman, and their birth has gladdened the mother-heart.

There were thousands and ten-thousands, of whom in His good pleasure He had determined, that this year they should pass from death unto life, and as redeemed from sin should kneel in endless thanksgiving at the Cross of their Savior, and they all have been gathered in, as the prodigal son they have returned to their Father and have not been made to be hirelings, but have been adopted as children of God.

And so it went on with the whole government and appointment of God. For one was prepared the cup of the wine of gladness, for the other the wormwood of affliction; for one God had a laugh about his lips, for the other the tear in the eye; for one was laid up sickness and adversity, for the other wealth and rejoicings of soul; and all this has come to the children of men, to you also and your house, not as consequence, nor according as you had chosen it, but according to His eternal counsel.

This year too was a piece of our human history, and of this year, too, God by Himself had intended to what extent He would advance or hold back the development of the events of the nations, and that very part of history that was appointed for this year, in those days and weeks and months has been enacted, and now that this year falls away, the whole world and all the peoples of that world stand, at that point of the way, where according to the secret counsel of God they should stand.

Also in the struggle between the Kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of the world, history goes on after a fixed line, and here too it holds good, that

all what God had intended by Himself regarding this year, that on one side His Kingdom should make advances, and on the other side by apostacy, unbelief and doubt would be held back, in the events of all those days, weeks and months, has actually been realized.

For the world, for our people, for the church of Christ, for your home, and for your personal life, it holds true of everything that had been determined in God's Counsel, *that thus it is done.*

And therein is rest for our heart.

It is no maelstrom, in which we are tossed about. It is no whirlwind, which makes us dance and play as autumn leaves. Our life, our existence is in God's hand. And that hand of our God gives direction, guidance and order to all things. And under this appointment of God everything has significance, for him that loves God the blessed assurance, that for him *all things will work together for good.*

Even this is not all.

There was in the year now ending, not only the doing and working of our God, but also the doing and the working of His human child, in his work.

No one can fathom that mystery to the bottom, and even the cleverest among the children of men stand speechless before this wondrous mystery, how it is possible, that in everything God's will goes through, and yet that man stands responsible before his God.

But understood or not, the fact, the matter, and the certainty of the matter remains. We have that certainty sealed in our prayers, when we called upon God for forgiveness of our sins. God Himself has sealed it to us in the inward address of our conscience. And even among men we do not hesitate one moment to hold young and old, man and woman,

master and servant, in brief every one responsible and accountable for his word and work. It may even be said that seldom heavier than on the evening of the old year that serious responsibility weighs upon our heart.

And therefore, when we overhear that voice from on High: *It is done,* let no one think alone of what God appoints for and over us, but let that voice directly appeal to our conscience, that this solemn declaration: *It is done,* refers with equal emphasis to our own past and to what in that past we have seen, meditated, thought, said, done, and what we have left undone.

And herein consists what pains, what oppresses. Not that ordinarily we are so dissatisfied with ourselves. On the contrary too great self-satisfaction is rather our common sin. Into this we fall most often, not from lack of honor, but because our standard of a good and holy life is so sinfully low. A broadcloth garment seen at twilight, will seem quite free from dust, but in the light of the noonday sun, will show clouds of dust, that cover it. And so it is with the garment of our soul. We do not see the dust on it, because we walk in twilight. But when at times, in broad daylight, greater seriousness and clearer light of God's holiness penetrates to our soul, our spiritual eye discovers very really whole spots of defilement, which otherwise we had not observed.

It is done, and irrevocably done, what we dropped into the stream of that year as our word, our deed, our utterance of life; but of itself herewith the question rises: What *should* have been done, and *how* should it have been done, and what with it all should have been the inner impulse of our heart? So of itself we go down into that depth where the inner impulses of the life of our soul put themselves in

motion, and we feel that He Who tries the heart and the reins, thereby prevents us from flattering and from censuring ourselves.

The old year in its seriousness asks for truth in the inward parts, for truth before God.

And when God's holy angels cover their faces with their wings, who of us does not cover his face in guilt and self-reproach at the accounting of his soul with that year, that has for ever passed away?

You would like to do that year *over again,* that, now as you see it from behind, you might give it an altogether different direction, spend it differently, live it differently, and above all be differently disposed in your heart under it all.

But see, that is cut off. It is no longer a blank year, for you to fill in. It is a year that went by and is ended. *It is all done.* And as it is done, so it *remains* written up against you. Even the bitterest sin, of which you accuse yourself, can not be taken out of it. As a chain it all lies linked together, and no one link can be taken away. So *was* your life, so it is done and so it lies at your responsibility now in your conscience, and once in the Last Judgment when the books are opened before the Throne of our God.

For the children of the world this works, according to their character, self-*misleading* and self-*hardening.*

Misleading with the superficial and happy hearted, who, at this complaint of the past, always imagine that from now on things will be different and better. About the *guilt* of the past few people are troubled. God is good and He will forgive. The only question is, in the year that they face, to break with their past, to take the way of the pious. and to persevere in that way. And though such a "grown child" may be a man of seventy years of age, and though he has made

himself believe this same thing fifty times before, fifty times to find himself deceived thereby, yet now again he quiets the unrest of his heart with the same selfmisleading. Thus far his life was play, now seriousness will come, and every one will see, that he has become different.

Of course, less superficial characters are incapable of such continuous self-misleading. On *this* evening of the old year they *remember* their earlier old year evenings, and stand perplexed in the face of the disappointing result. There was every time the complaint about the year that went, and every time the purpose of tenderer seriousness, to face a better future. And yet, they went on to be the old slaves, and at every new old year's evening, they faced again the same self-reproach. Why then should they still flatter themselves with the hope of an holier life! The outcome shows, that their nature, their character is such and not otherwise. And so they abandon the struggle, which leads to nothing, and make unholy peace with their unholy existence. It becomes *self-hardening.*

Only he who on the evening of the old year can confess his Lord and Savior, sees a way of escape. "It is done," O, truly, "done", what with the closing year must cover his face with shame, but in the face of that painful past he stands not alone. Jesus is with him. Jesus is near to him, and it is that Savior, Who with the light of Divine compassion in His face, covers this long and bitter past with the blood-sprinkled garment of His accomplished righteousness. When you are God's child, and with broken heart and contrite spirit kneel at the Cross of Golgotha, Jesus cuts that past off from you, takes it forever as His own, and in quiet faith you perceive a blessed sensation, as though there had

never been sin in your past, so pure and so holy you feel yourself in Christ before your God. For this alone is the faith that justifies, so to stand before God, as though you had never sinned, yea, as though you had done all that Christ in your place has done for you.

So there comes oil of joy for sadness and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, and thanks, eternal thanks flow out to the God of all compassion, Who with such an all penetrating grace has filled your heart and refreshed it. An old year's evening without Christ is so feverish and selfmisleading, but with Jesus, with faith in your Savior so rich in holy peace. For it speaks for itself, that by faith transferring to Jesus *all that is done,* is no act of externally joining oneself to the Mediator, it is not a momentary action of going out to Jesus, and then of withdrawing oneself again from Him. Faith that here glistens, either does not operate, or it works in that mystical fellowship of soul and life with Him, Who from hence forth is become the Chief Shepherd and Bishop of your soul. Being one with Him in the faith, which justifies you before God, includes of itself, that you face the future in fellowship with that same Savior, and that the anxiety of how to find better paths, how to come to betterment and sanctification and deepening of life, is lifted from your troubled heart and laid upon your Savior. So both, with the eye to the past, and with the eye to the future, every question and all anxious care solves itself in the one, mighty question of life, *whether you belong to Jesus,* and thus are partaker both in life and death of the only true comfort. This does not say that there will be no more trouble and anxiety about your circumstances in this earthly life. Some people's lot in this earthly life is very hard and

painful. But under it all the heart does not faint. And when under the impression of Jesus' mighty word we have looked again at the lilies of the field, which grow and flourish, and at the birds of heaven, which neither sow nor reap, unobservedly on the evening of the old year the soul glides into that sacred track, first and alone to seek the Kingdom of our God, knowing that all things we truly need, as of itself shall be cast into our lap. Then we stand no more *under,* but *above* the world, as we know that now we are one with Him, Who in the youngest day shall proclaim for the last time: *It is done,* and Who, after all things of the world shall have been done, shall forever open to us His blessed Kingdom.

It is not in broad circles, that on the evening of the old year these Christian comfortings refresh the heart. The faithful have become few, and even in many Christian families the real salt of the Gospel has lost its savor. Therefore let all those, who by God's wondrous grace have been permitted still to keep their stand by that Fountain of eternal comforting, enjoy with clearer perception, with deeper warmth of feeling, with the more tender thanks, this love of God in the fellowship with Immanuel. Oh, may He, in Whose hand our life is, grant to them and to their loved ones on this old year's evening the foretaste of *that rest, which remaineth for the people of God!*

V

"HIM ONLY SHALT THOU SERVE!"

EVERY morning, as the light rises upon us, there lies a task to our account, which God wills that we shall perform that day. So there is a task to be performed each week. A task, that is laid upon you every month. And so likewise a task, that waits to be performed at every new year, on which you enter.

This year too we entered again, *to work.*

We are no lords and ladies, who are in this world for our own pleasure, but we are menservants and maidservants, in the service of the Lord our God.

He is our Lord, and we are to be used of Him, and for our small and seemingly insignificant part to labor with Him in the great and gigantic task, which our Lord wills to see finished in this His great and mighty house, from the beginning of the centuries to the end.

You lack therefore all right, to enter upon this year with the thought in your heart, that you will plan, what you yourself would desire to do. He who takes it this way, is wrong, and never brings matters to a good end.

No, your position is that of *manservant* and *maidservant* of the Most High, whose eyes must be on the hand of their Lord, and who may not enter upon this year with any other sense or purpose, than in *everything to serve* that great and mighty Lord, to serve Him by day and by night, from the first day of the year to its close.

In *everything* for Him, *never anything else* than

for Him, ready at the Word that proceedeth out of *His* mouth.

As the angels in heaven, so we on the earth.

And therefore daily the prayer on the lips: Thy will be done by us on earth, as in heaven by Thy cherubim and seraphim!

"God's service," was a beautiful word for religion, but which by misuse has become a pitiful word.

For "God's service" now means: I have a life in the world, a life for my thought, a life for my heart, a life in my family, and also a life of a churchly nature, and that is my divine service.

So when one prays it is called divine service; divine service when one sings praises to God; when I pay my vows; and when I place myself at the Sacrament and under the preaching of the Word; but what besides and behind this lies in my life and heart, all that may be what it will, but is not real Divine Service.

Not to propagate this misused word in this false sense, our fathers therefore spoke more of religion; and used the idea of *serving* God for the service of the Lord in *every* pathway and in *all* conditions of life.

So Jesus had pointed it out to us.

He too made a distinction between *religion* in the narrower sense and *divine service* in life, and in His beating back of Satan, He calls this: "*Worshiping* the Lord our God, and *serving* Him alone."

And though the one is not thinkable without the other, and it is not possible to *serve* God, if you do not *worship* Him, yet the distinction between the two is absolutely indispensable.

You too should surely have this year religion in the narrower sense, and seek fellowship in the

mysteries of grace and of prayer; but above and beyond this worship, you are to *serve* the Lord your God, i. e. your real God's *service* must consist in the consecration to the Lord of your whole life, of all your labor, of every talent that is your's, with the sole question in it all: *What wills the Lord that I shall do?*

Thus on new year's day you do not have to sum up all sorts of things, which in this year you are to do. This you can not do, and it would spoil the matter for you.

For to serve God is not the doing of two, three, ten *particular* things which stand more directly connected with the struggle *for* God's kingdom and *against* Satan. No, but to serve God is *always to be servant;* even in the most ordinary matters of every day life, in fact, in everything to do the will of the Lord; and to live, think, fight, and labor not for yourself, but only because He lays it upon you. He your King, your Creator and your Lord.

More yet, it must be "being servant" from *thankfulness.*

Not for gold or silver, but having been redeemed from the slavery of Satan by the blood of the unpunishable and spotless Lamb you have now been brought out from the house of bondage, not henceforth to be your own lord and master; but to be and to remain for ever *servant* of God and *bondslave* of Christ.

At the same time *child,* O, surely, and therefore free from Satan; but never free from your Lord. The Glory and the liberty of the children of God is never that now they may do what is convenient for them to do and that they may live as they please; but always and inexorably, that *they are the Lord's.* His purchases. Belonging to Him. His menservants and

maidservants. Serving day and night in His temple.

This appliies to the child at school, to the maid in her kitchen, to the mechanic in his daily labor, to the clerk in his office, to the mother in her home, to the merchant behind his counter, to the judge upon the seat of honor, to the king upon his throne.

Every person must serve God. He who is still unregenerate, by reason of the claim of *creation* from compulsion; and he who has been transposed into grace: from *thankfulness* moreover.

Understand this well.

You should not say: I do my work at school, at my trade, in my calling according to the requirements of the work, and for as much as *good* or *evil* is involved in this, I direct myself according to God's will.

This is something altogether other, than being a *servant* of God.

No, to be *servant* of God, simply means, that everything you do, in school, in the shop, office or study, must not be done for your own sake or for that of another, but *for God's sake.*

This a child should know: God put me in *this* school; God put me under *this* teacher; God made the rules of writing and reading and arithmetic; God so divided the days into hours; that so in all this the child may see divine ordinances.

And as with the child, so it should be with each of us.

There is human reckoning, human agreement, human order and command, to which we owe response. The needs of life frequently stir us to work, when otherwise we might sit still. But in all these regulations and commands and needs the hand

of the Lord is over us, and if it is well done, we serve Him in His temple.

And so it must be with you also this year.

Then the sense of duty puts you in the harness; there comes to you the sense of glorious calling: then every calling, be it that of mechanic or farmer, becomes a *divine calling* to the man concerned; then every sort of labor is ennobled; then there beams upon all your activities a friendly light from Above; and all disagreeableness and dissatisfaction gives way, because then you are always busily engaged in the service of your Lord.

Against one thing, however, you should be on your guard: do not take this stream of daily activities to be all of your allotted task.

You have yet an altogether other labor to your account.

You have every day to settle your affairs with God in prayer.

You have to form and sanctify your character.

You have to put a check upon your passions and moods and to bridle them.

You have to effect an influence upon your wife, upon your children, upon your environment; and to watch the influence you exert.

You have to study the talents that are in you, that they be not buried in the earth.

In brief, you have not merely to labor in the *visible,* but also in the *invisible.*

You must serve your God not least in this, that you help to bring Satan's work to nought.

To nought round about you in your family, and to nought in the world of your inmost self.

VI

IN THE ORDER OF HIS COURSE.

THE return of the change of year reminds us of the prayer of the man of God: "O God, teach me to *number* my days. So to number them, that I may apply my heart unto wisdom." (Ps. 90.) He who prays for this acknowledges that of himself he does not do it, and now takes refuge with the God of his life, that He may teach him.

Thus there are three possibilities: Either you have already come to the seriousness and thoughtful numbering of your days, in which case you owe God thanks. For herein is grace, and it makes your heart wise.

Or you do not number them, but are ready to do so, and pray God for it. And God will answer your prayer, and though you are not yet where you would be, you earnestly desire greater seriousness of life.

Or finally you do not number your days, and do not pray, that you might learn to do so. And so you lack the real seriousness of life, and your heart is still foolish.

At ordinary times we pass this by unobservedly. Life is full of changes and chases us with ever changing impressions. Hence in ordinary life our attention is not centered on this point. Everything rather diverts us away from it and scatters our thoughts.

But God the Lord has made divisions in the course of days. A division of weeks, a division of months and also of years, of which naturally the last,

because it occurs but once a year, is the most striking, the loudest speaking. Our old and new year.

Neither of these have been instituted by human arbitrariness. God created them when He gave to sun and earth their mutual ordinance.

And so this change of year again is a call, not from men but from God, and again puts the question to us: Are you already so far advanced, that you not merely live your days, but also number them, and in doing so is the seriousness of life, the genuine wisdom ripening in your heart?

One interprets this as though he should turn in upon himself, and say to himself: "I am already of such and such an age. Death begins to come nearer to me. Is my soul prepared, am I safe eternally?"

Surely, such pondering has merit, and numbering of our days may lead to this.

But yet, this can not be the real meaning of the word.

For, taken in this way, this word would only be a call, to those who have reached the half of their days, and who from the zenith of their life gradually go down to their grave.

But it would not address those, who are still in their prime, who are still young, especially not our children. But the prayer: "Teach us to number our days", is general, and therefore must include both old and young.

For though it is true, that our children and young people may die, yet when we number our days, we reckon after the common standard, as the man of God himself indicated it, and we estimate a human life at *seventy*, or if we are very strong, at *eighty* years.

Moreover, to say by oneself: "I am already so and so old," is no *numbering* of one's *days.*

In that case no one reckons by *days,* but by *years.* Neither then does one count his years, but thinks at once of the age he has reached.

Numbering goes one by one.

So to number one's days is a *daily* task. As at the door of the sheepfold the shepherd counts his sheep, adding one every time another sheep goes in, so he only *numbers* his *days,* who every morning or every evening when again a day is done, or a new day breaks, in his consciousness lets it count, and adds it to the number of his days of the past.

Therefore we wrote at the top of our meditation: "In the order of his course," a word borrowed from the priestly ministration of Zachariah (Luke 1:8), and with whom the order of his course meant, that he had to minister certain days in the temple, and that on those days he had to render his appointed service, his fixed task of the day in that sanctuary.

When a new day came along, Zachariah was not free to steal that day for himself. He received that day from his God for a certain end, for an appointed task, for an indicated service; and it was only well, when at the end of that day the task of the order of his course was performed.

So the numbering of your days implies for every one of you who reads this, that you have an order of the course, that order must be appointed in your days, that as a something that is His, of which He must not be robbed, and which must not be squandered, you are to spend each new day *in His service,* and which, at its close, shall inquire of you before

God's eye whether it has brought to God what was required of it.

When in a family ten people live together, there must in that family ten times one day's task be performed.

Something which does not exclude recreation. Rather the Lord's day indicates, that this must also be. But for relaxation you should not take a single day, except as you are convinced, that God the Lord wills it, that He permits it, yea, that He has ordered that day for this purpose and not for your work.

What should be resisted, is *selfwilfulness, self-voluntariness,* thoughtlessness in the use of your days.

Resisted must be the false idea, that your days are your own, to do with as you will.

That you are free to dispose of them.

That if needs be you may waste and squander them, one after the other.

In such an interpretation of your life there lurks *sin.* It is overlooked, that it is God, Who day by day lengthens your life and maintains it.

It is reckoning without God.

It is lack of seriousness of life.

Taken on a large scale over against your God, in Whose service you stand, it is *shameless daythievery.*

In this there is an inside and an outside, for you have a life toward the *world* and a life in your *heart.* Thus twofuld service. In both services you have your day's task, the order of your course, the service laid upon you on the part of God in His world.

With regard to the *outside,* this sin is less frequent with the poor than with the rich. He who must work for his bread, at a trade, in family-

service, in an office, in an exacting position, of himself must go on and on. Each day has its own appointed activities, and as a rule these are brought to a finish.

The *sin* of wasting time and squandering of days in a lazy and easy way of doing nothing is therefore much more common with those, who do *not* have to work for their living, either because they themselves are rich, or because father or husband make liberal provision for the needs of their lives.

They who are poorer are not better therefore, and they who are richer worse. For experience teaches, that when a poor man becomes rich, he too, frequently squanders his day, and again, that when a rich man becomes poor, presently labors as steadily as any.

It should also be recognized, that it is far easier, when each morning at six or eight o'clock our work begins, than when one must ask himself: "How shall I spend this long day profitably?"

This however does not change in the least the seriousness of the matter. He who does not work for his living, must yet work each day for God. Not merely half an hour or a whole hour, but all day. Only it is laid upon him, with far more thought and carefulness to find the answer to the question: what the order of his course, what his daytask is.

Late rising, slow dressing, at leisure taking three, four meals, going out a while and coming home again, receiving a caller, glancing at a book, is no daytask and no lifetask; and especially the wife or woman may well ask herself seriously, what God wills today, and what God wills her to do tomorrow.

And therefore, as the new year begins, each one of us may well put ourselves the question seriously, whether he might not make a beginning with that

serious numbering of his days; cut off that squandering of time; and break for good with that sinful, that thoughtless, that continuous *daythievery*.

But of course with this outside of life the matter is not ended. Life too has its inside, the side of the heart.

Let not therefore he, who has worked hard all day long for his bread, think, that therewith the *order of his course*, his *daytask* is ended. On the contrary, there are men and women, who their lifelong have toiled and labored every day, and who have yet not numbered their days, and have never applied their heart unto wisdom.

There is also an internal work, in the care of the heart, in ordering our life with our God, in watching the word of our tongue, in bridling our passions, in study of temperament and character, in the sharp investigation of our failings and passions, in the nursing of the flowers of the soul and of the fruits of the spirit.

And of this also Jesus says: *There are twelve hours in the day*. Let us walk in the light.

For what avails it, that you ripen for the world and have the respect of your fellowmen, when the field of your heart lies fallow, and little else grows there than weeds.

And therefore, as there is an order of your course each morning for your *outward* life, so let there also be an order of your course each morning for your *inward* life. And well-spent is your day and your life, only when that twofold task according to the order of your course given you of God has been fulfilled.

He who thus far has not numbered his days, let

him take occasion from the changing of the year, to break with this thoughtlessness once and for all.

He Who demands this of you, is the Lord, Who Himself in that changing of the year sends out His call to you.

And if you say: *I can not,* then follow the example of the man of God, and *pray* that God will teach you.

VII

"ALL THESE THINGS SHALL BE ADDED UNTO YOU."

AFTER the *tension* of Old year's night the morning of New Year generally brings a certain *relaxation.*

The seriousness of the Old Year has something compelling about it, something that brings us together, and puts sadness in the heart by reason of the frailty of our life; yea, you may even say, that celebrating an anniversary in the *evening-hour* is already by itself far more striking, than an anniversary celebration in the *early morning* after you have just awakened and nervous sensitiveness is less keen;—but for all that there is something oppressive about the Old Year's evening. It mostly ends in the tear of emotion more than in the laugh of unbridled joy. It is and remains a *departure,* even as New Year's morning speaks to you of a new *birth,* of the birth of a year of life, that lies before you as a field of corn to be harvested, to which no sickle has yet been put.

To see such a year before you gives you a feeling of wealth. How much time there is there, of which you shall have the disposal. It is as though no end could ever come to it. What shall we not do in that long endless year, and accomplish, and bring to pass! One can not take it in, and that very fact of inability to grasp it all quickens the poetry of hope in the heart.

On New Year's morning you actually see such relaxation in people. The expression of face is freer,

more relaxed. Happy New Year wishes flow from the lips of all. In gifts hands are generous and equally ready are hands of others to receive them. Especially they who are younger, who *accompanied* the seriousness of the preceding evening rather than shared it more personally, feel, now that the New Year is come, they are themselves again. They do not yet know the anxious look, wherewith they who are older of days see the measure of their life shorten. On the contrary, their life does not speed *too fast* for them, but rather *too slowly.* They always reckon ahead. This yet and that yet, and only then shall they reach their goal. And now, this New Year also brings this passionately expected object nearer to them. Forward therefore with rapid steps. This year too hurried through to reach what must bring them the realization of their life's ideal.

Among those on the other hand who are more advanced in life, this joyous note of cheery heartedness when it is again the first of January, does not always meet that glad response.

With many, for a part at least, it does; for this New Year also speaks of the mercies of our God. It is His faithfulness that we are still here, that we yet possess one another, that so much of good is our portion. And as in Israel even every new moon brought a day of rejoicing before the face of the Lord, so now among the children of God New Year day fills the heart with a feeling of thanks and of worship.

But do not forget, there are many, even among God's people, who by hard work and strenuous rowing against the current, only just again a whole year long, feel so exhausted and discouraged, that the mere thought of having to face again such hardship

without end, makes them shrink back; and sometimes makes them say: O, my God, why longer this exhausting struggle with never ending adversity!

So, for these children of adversity, "New Year" itself heightens the apprehensive feeling of carping care, wherewith they face the future.

The year again went by, and the end of it was so trying.

Then it pinches on every side. Everything has been tried. One sees no chance of finding new ways of escape. Cares and with it needs continue to oppress. And yet the prosperous day, for which one had ever waited and hoped, yea, which had been so earnestly prayed for from God, does not come.

And as it is now New Year again, they try to pray God for deliverance; but, and this is so hard, while they pray they realize in their heart, that it is no more believing prayer. It is not yet the prayer of despair; but prayer without elasticity to really pray, and without prophecying in the *Amen* that closes the prayer, the certainty of being heard and answered.

Might someone, who reads this, belong to their number, in their discouragement let them be reminded of the word of Jesus: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; *and all these things shall be added unto you*" (Matt. 6:33).

And then the likely answer is: Do not taunt me with that word of Jesus, for I also know it well, but when you must pay what you owe, and have not the money to pay with, what good is this word? I serve the Lord, for the sake of His kingdom I would be glad to do anything, but I must live, and with honor support my family. And, alas, there is no business, however much I have prayed God for it. And there-

fore do not press this word of Jesus on me. Confess, if you were in my place, would it not rather become to you also an *offence to your faith?*

The language of such grief, which they try so hard to hide, we understand and appreciate the inward gloom of such disheartened faith.

And it is even as you have thought. Prosperity and increase and good luck in home and in business you want, and now you will serve God, as means by which to obtain them, and if God is indeed true to His Word, He will and must cast into your lap that prosperity, that increase and that good luck in home and in business,—and so you were bound to be deceived, and that disappointment can not but shock your confidence of faith.

In this sense, however, the word of Jesus was not meant, and if so interpreted it is not true.

No, the service of God and of His Kingdom tends *to bring your God to His honor,* and by no means to have things here below go easy for you.

Read in Hebrew II of the cloud of witnesses. Men and women "who sought God and His righteousness", and of them is written, that they suffered, and, "were stoned, were sawn asunder, slain with the sword, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, and have wandered about in deserts, and in dens and caves of the earth."

See, that language is different!

This is a different seeking after "God and his righteousness", from what thus far you have done.

And yet these are the men and women, who never lost courage, and who now wear the crown before the Throne.

Here is a mystery. The faith-mystery of childship.

The *servant* serves his master and receives wages, and on these wages he subsists. But the *child* serves father and mother, and asks for no wages, but father and mother provide food and shelter.

This is the difference.

For so there are here two that serve God. One serves Him for wages that it might be well with him. That is the form of the servant. The other serves God, because he "seeks Him and His righteousness" and God cares for him. That is the form of childship.

"Seek God and His righteousness" not that presently you may receive in exchange earthly welfare and prosperity, but because you want *God* and *hunger* and *thirst* after His righteousness.

He who hungers, does not seek bread, that he may exchange it for a flower, but for bread's own sake, to eat it, and be satisfied by it.

And so here, whoever hungers after God and his righteousness, reaches out for it, though he should lose everything for the sake of it, yea, though it might cost him his life.

In ordinary life it thus comes to pass, that you spend all your strength, all your talent, in the service of the Lord, and that in all your interests and affairs you work for God alone; so work, that His approval may rest upon it, and that you ask after no outcome.

How then can you live?

That is what God takes care of, and as He cares for it, it shall be good to you.

And, though you may have worked ever so hard, each day your prayer: "Give Thou me my daily bread," shall be sincere and no mere form, and whether you are called rich or poor, each day you will be able to thank your God heartily for it.

And what do you gain thereby?

Much in every way. Let us point out to you a twofold gain.

First you will do your work better, and so in business your work will count for more.

He who in business works for himself, can put off things, pass them on to some one else, take things easy, can also practice ignoble and dishonest things in it. But he who in all his work knows and feels: "I am busy for God and in His service", can never be dishonest, can not come into debts, and puts into the hand that scours such double strength, that the metal which he scours becomes altogether bright and shining.

A simple illustration. A cook in a hotel, who knows that a prince became a guest in that hotel, will for the sake of that royal personage prepare his food yet better than ordinary. The knowledge that he cooks for a King, increases his strength and heightens his ingenuity.

And so a child of God, that knows: "I work, I labor for my King," will because of it deliver *better* work, will work more carefully and handily, and thanks to this stimulus he will excel in excellency those who work for themselves.

So our fathers understood it, who thanks to their faith superseded other nations, and experienced, that godliness has a promise *"also for the life that now is"*.

This in the first place, and now the second.

Success in business and among people depends so incredibly much upon the *disposition of heart and mind.*

It that is sullen, dull and heavy, dejected and timorous, work will show the marks of it, it will lack

animation, and by that depression of spirits, in everything the mainspring will be wanting, which vigorously does things.

If on the other hand you are in high spirits, feel yourself carried by inspiring ideas, elasticity revives in you, work prospers and succeeds, and with pleasure you resume work every time, with inward delight to bring it to a finish.

And this last energetic disposition of spirits, is what Jesus would waken in you.

He knows, that, so long as you continue to look dejectedly upon your position in the world, there is, O, so much, that will press down on you with weight of lead, will stifle you, and take all courage from you.

And therefore with a strong hand Jesus takes hold of your heart, to draw your eye away *entirely* from these depressing cares, and says to you: Leave that to Me.

And now He directs your heart to an high, an inspiring, an heart-uplifting end, to the question indeed, how in your heart, in your home, in your business and in all your affairs you may find the Lord your God and delight yourself in His righteousness.

He who hath ears to hear, and understands that word of Jesus, casts himself upon it, and begins at once to seek his God and His righteousness.

This makes him rich, this makes him courageous, this inspires him.

And the wondrous outcome is, that now of itself work succeeds better, and that a providence of God watches over him and over his, for which presently: together with his own upon his knees, O, so heartily he thanks his God.

VIII

"OH, HOW GREAT IS THY GOOD!"

HE beginning of a year is something different from what year after year we celebrate on the anniversary of our birth.

What you call your "birthday" is a division in your *personal* life. It chiefly concerns you alone, and only *through you and because* of you relatives and friends participate in your festal joy.

A new year is altogether different.

Then too a new year begins, as on your birthday; but it is not *your* year that renews itself, but the year *of all together.* Thus as on your birthday your joy *separates* you from others, that for one moment the life of relatives and friends may turn *around you as center* (something which the egoism of some finds most pleasing, and which by lack of measure, has spoiled many a child) so on the other hand at new year that personal interest withdraws entirely in the background.

In fact, new year is every one's birthday, and because it is every one's, it is no one's.

What is celebrated on that day, is rather the life that is common to us all, and very naturally therefore the turn of the year is the time for closing up of books, for making out bills, and for looking into one's affairs to see, with what prospects a new struggle can be faced in the midst of our pressing social life.

On one's own birthday, no one thinks of this, but when new year is rung in, it is this trying investiga-

tion, which amid the winter-cold makes warm the head of many.

Going over the state of your affairs, your possessions, is at such a time surely duty too for the child of God. Carelessness in one's affairs is a blot upon your childship. And it must be one of the fruits of the Cross, that you are ever able to lay bare your affairs, and that before the eyes of God and man everything may be found in order.

But with this a child of God does not leave it.

To renew his courage to live, he must needs think of still another treasure, and it is a delight to him, at such a time as this, to feel himself rich in God, and to appreciate the spiritual good that is his in the overflowing grace of his heavenly Father.

So long as it does not come to this, the division in lots is unequal. The one overrich and the other painfully poor, even among God's children.

But when that second, that heavenly, that spiritual treasure is counted over and weighed out, at once this difference disappears, not infrequently to pass over into opposite results.

For the "good of God", which He has laid up for His elect, is objectively equally great for all, but it matters so much, that one has scarcely touched that treasure with his finger, while the other has delved therein with both hands.

And then it is not infrequent. that the rich after the world among God's children, scarcely allows himself the trouble, even so much as to think of that treasure, while on the other hand the poor after the world, by no means always, but in some cases, has dug so deeply into that heavenly treasure, that his wealth of soul astounds you.

No, it was not in the days of his prosperity, but

rather in a moment of great anxiety regarding outward circumstances, that a man like David came to exclaim: *"Oh, how great is thy good,* which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee" (Ps. 31:19, Dutch version).

And by these words David said none too much of it.

By grace to stand in faith, is indeed a wealth to be esteemed above all else.

You are aware of this in yourself, when under the multiplicities of life, by your own fault, the flame of faith in you burns low. Then you feel at once so poor, so bereft, so cut off from what at other times was the wealth of your soul. But no sooner does elastic, inspiring, sanctifying faith return into your breast, but it seems as if the sluices of heaven are opened, and streams of peace and grace flow out toward you.

He who stands outside of faith, and he who has nothing but imitated faith, has no idea of that soul's wealth. He hears it spoken of in highest terms, and that praise affects him pleasantly, he joins with others as they sing of it, but he does not taste it, neither does he enjoy it. In that full stream of delight which makes every one drunk with gladness, he has never bathed *his* soul.

He has gone by the side of that stream, but has never ventured himself in it. It was too deep for him, too risky, and thereby he lost the pure, rich relaxation and refreshing of soul, which only the throwing of self into the stream of God's elect children can bring.

"Oh, how great is thy good, which thou hast laid up *for them that fear thee*", but then for them alone.

New Year unveils every time again to you the end

of your life. With all of us it is a going unto death. Death beckons every hour. And the question: "Let me know, O Lord, how many or how few are the days of my life", also with an eye to our life's task, at all times troubles our heart.

All the fickleness of our modern world has not ever yet been able to remove from the change of the year the *Memento mori*, i. e. this reminder of our approaching death.

The question: Shall this be the year of my death? ever presses itself upon us with striking eloquence.

From its nature that thought of death is terrifying to him who has no other good than the good of the world. For with death everything falls away from you. Even the dearest you had on earth. "Naked you came forth from your mother's womb", naked shalt thou return unto the earth.

He who then has no heavenly good, dies poverty poor, even without a garment to cover his shame before God.

But with God's child, when it comes to this, it is all different. He who may die in the arms of eternal Love, in his dying is unspeakably rich. He exchanges the rags of earth for the garment of glory. Present neediness and want for the riches and wealth of heaven. His heart receives, for what he left behind on earth, his God and his Christ and the whole company of the saints made perfect.

For the scorn of this world from his God a crown.

The "good of God" however does not limit itself for His child to this. Not only *in* dying, but already *before* dying, that good of God makes him so rich.

"Many vicissitudes, many afflictions are the lot of the righteous" on earth, and he is least spared the carping care of life. Because he is no *bastard* but a

real child of God, chastisement must be his portion. Affliction itself must train him, and in affliction, by the strength of his faith, he must glorify the Name of God.

But though he continue in the world, he suffers so differently from the world.

Of him the Psalmist sang so truly: "Thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness" (41:3). For it is so different whether you suffer mortal agony alone, or whether in the midst of it Eternal Love salves your wound, renews your vital powers, inwardly comforts your soul, and gives you quiet, sweet, holy peace to drink, though your eye be moist with tears of pain and sadness.

With God at your side all suffering is as a dark cloud, but lined with golden lining. The loveliness of the Lord God breaking through to you. First your God in the thunder, then your God in the stormwind, but finally during and after prayer, your God in the whisper of a still small voice.

And apart from the hour of such acute suffering, how blessed, when, with the thousand cares that overwhelm you, with the needs and anxieties that pursue you, you do not have to carry that heavy load alone, for that your Savior takes it from you, releases your heart from it, and makes you cast all your cares and all your sorrows upon that eternal faithfulness of your Father Who is in heaven, Who speaks to you, in a rest-bringing whisper, saying: "I will bring it to pass, in the mount of my holiness it shall be foreseen!"

Yea, even though at a moment of such great need, there is no mention of such care for you, it is even then such great wealth, to be a partaker of the "good

of your God", though your sole concern is the peace of your soul.

Is there anything more glorious or more blessed on earth, than, all alone by oneself to be in earnest, tender prayer before God? Do you know of any earthly wealth, that can measure up from far to that wealth of soul? To be priviledged to offer praise and love in your supplications. To be allowed to give thanks and to express in your whispered word before God all the grace that has been enjoyed. To forget time and for one brief moment to have met God. Till in the end you can confess with Job: "I had heard of thee with the hearing of my ear, *but now mine eye seeth thee.*"

There is no greater good on earth, at least not for those who have learned to know God as their *Highest Good.*

True, that fellowship does not continue in its fulness. Cruel circumstances of life every time make mists to arise again, and our wicked and guilty heart requites our God, alas, all too often defiant sin for His unspeakable mercifulness.

But yet, the Lord does not remain standing far off. He always has new "good" again laid up for them that fear Him. That they dwell in His tent. That He covers them with the wings of His eternal compassions. That He satisfies them with His blessed fellowship. That He makes a peace which passeth all understanding flow forth through the veins of their soul. That He makes them rejoice in the Spirit, exultant even when they go through the valley of death.

He, the faithful Shepherd.

Our Father Who is in heaven.

Oh, how great is Thy good, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee!

IX

"THY GLORY UPON THEIR CHILDREN."

T every transition of year into year *the ninetieth Psalm* addresses us ever again in the majesty of its touching language.

More than three thousand times that change of year has taken place, since Moses sang this *psalm of the generations,* this song of the *centuries,* this hymn of the passing years, and still his psalm speaks to us, as though it were only sung yesterday.

At the time when he wrote this psalm, Moses was evidently past the sixtieth year of his age, and approaching the seventieth, and saw at most some five or more years as future before him. "As to the days of our years, therein are *seventy* years, and when we are very strong they are *eighty* years." Moses did not even surmise, as his song shows, that God would so lengthen his life beyond measure, that he might lead his people from Egypt through the wilderness into Canaan.

In "trouble and sorrow" his life had worn away, and now the fact impressed him, *how quickly his life might be cut off,* and how with every new year on which he entered it became *a flying away, a passing of our days in God's wrath, a spending of our fleeting days as a tale that is told.* He felt himself *"carried away as with a flood",* and as one who is continually *"as a sleep".* And then ..... suddenly any day Death might enter in through his window. Still

flourishing in the morning, and before it is evening, be cut off by God's terrible almightiness, *to wither away* in the grave.

But that very perception, that his life was approaching its end, and his "work" on earth would go on no further, inspires him for this prayerful song of the ages, in which his supplications diverge in two directions.

"Establish Thou *the work of our hands,* yea, the work of our hands establish Thou it," thus he prays with the eye on what lies behind him.

"Let Thy glory be seen upon my children," that is his prayer for what is to come, when he shall be no more.

Past and *future* as interbraided.

In the "past" lies *the accomplished work,* which God alone can establish. In the "future" the *rise of his children* and children's children from generation to generation, upon which God Himself alone could make to appear His glory.

How broad, how elevating of soul is this grand interpretation of the passing away and the self-renewal of the year!

No narrow-souled standing still at the year that now is gone, and the new year, that now comes, but a courageous climbing to the top of the mountains, and from that high mountaintop with one look to view all of his own life, yea, all the life of this world, that lies behind and that stretches itself before him.

So he looks back to far generations behind. "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place in *all generations.*" Yea, he goes back to and behind the Creation: "Before the mountains were brought forth or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting Thou art God."

And now he sees, how through these thousands of years God has caused one generation of men to be born after the other, but also equally often and equally unchangeably has said to those born children of men: *"Return, ye children of men."*

And so life hastens on and on. Generations come, and generations go, now flourishing, presently withering, and because of sin trouble, and sorrow, and death chasing after them, till they too go under and disappear, and God again populates all those cities and villages with *new people,* who have been born from those parents, and continue the work of those earlier generations; and under all these changeabilities God alone ever remaining the same, He in whose eyes "a thousand years are but as yesterday when it is past."

And in this flood of centuries, in this stream of years Moses himself drifts along. He is but just come, and already his life hastens to its close. He feels that presently he too goes away.

But though he goes, he leaves two things behind, his *work* and his *children.*

And both of these he now commits to God.

That *work,* O God, establish it in the midst of that stream of years. And those children, in whom my blood lives on, O, God, let *Thy* glory appear upon them.

Better still, for even in his children he is not selfish, but embraces in the same prayer, with his own children, also the children of his friends and brethren, yea, the children of all the redeemed of the Lord: "Let thy work be seen of all *thy servants,* and thy glory upon their children.

At the beginning of a new year head and heart can be so filled with other things.

With things that by themselves are by no means

sinful, with which in very deed the heart must be engaged.

He who suffered from weakness and disease, longs for improvement and recuperation. The balance between income and output which must now be made out, can in prospect bring fear to the heart. One may be at a turningpoint in life, as when presently lovers are wedded, or, for some one else a fixed position in life, long desired, at last is about to be realized, in brief, within the small, narrow circle of the present there can be all sorts of things to disquiet the heart, and why should not such desires with supplication be permitted to come before God?

But yet, we desire so ardently, that at such turningpoints the Lord's people should not thus remain standing in the low table lands, but should show that they carry something of the eternal in their heart. For this, they must climb the mountaintop with Moses, from which the backward and forward look into eternity, scans the *whole river of time,* and they that are known of the Lord can live in the future *of their children.*

So only do they live *the life of the Covenant.* After the rule of the *"Unto you and unto your seed."* So only they carry out the Baptism-thought: *"You and your children* and as many as are afar off."

Surely we pass away. Not long now, before our place is in the Fatherland above. But from one side we do *not* go away. In our children our life goes on, and the thread of that life, which here we dropped, we presently take up again, when at the return of Christ, our own children's children, and the great grandchildren of our children's children shall meet us before the Throne of the Lamb.

Our name perishes, but in our children our name,

and our generation goes on, or rather not our generation, but the generation from which we sprang. By the wondrous institution of marriage the interlinking of our generation extends itself, and links itself to other generations. But it is one stream, pushed forward in one direction, of one particular sort of human life, as it has particularized itself in your generation; and that in the generation of so many that continuance of life of those who have died is *not* seen, *is our own fault.*

How many there are who never think of that continuance of life in their children and children's children. In whose prayer that outflowing of their own blood in the future of the generations has found no place. Who have developed no character of their own, and therefore could not cause a type to live on in their generation. And who, yea, love their children, and care for them, but have no faint idea of this appearing of the glow of glory upon their children and children's children, to distant generations.

Even when it comes to marriage, how often it happens, that for all sorts of reasons one remains unmarried, with no ardent desire to continue one's own life in following generations; and that at the same time, for this follows from it, one cuts off an other from this opportunity.

How much higher the ground on which Moses stood, to whom that future of his children, came first in his thoughts and in the deliberations of his heart. His *work* truly he commits to God, but above all *his children,* that the glory of the Lord might appear upon them.

And where the prayer was such, how glorious has been the outcome there!

For has there been one generatian, like the gene-

ration of Jacob, upon which the glow of the Lord's grace has appeared so gloriously upon the children and children's children?

To carry one's children on the heart. Therewith to enter upon the new year. Under that blessed constellation to live through the year. It stands so much higher than "to be troubled about many things." It elevates, and gives the soul that *holy daring* to face the future, for he who puts it upon his children, his help stands in the name of his God. It cuts off narrow-heartedness, and small-souledness. It makes our outlook broad. It makes one reach out far into future ages.

Provided—for on this it depends—that this carrying upon the heart of our children does not become a sort of idolizing of our darlings, making the all-in-all of our care of them the desire to keep them exempt from temptation and with anxious tenderness to train them, but without reckoning with the spot and place, the service and the calling *in the Kingdom of Christ* that shall be theirs.

They can be shown by the tens, who have been brought up, O, so carefully, and nothing has become of them of count for the Kingdom of Christ, or could become, because all that tender care had the child in view, and the welfare of that child, but not that child as "man or maidservant of the Lord."

The child then becomes something apart. It must be healthy, it must become brave, it must go to heaven, and on earth obtain as good a position as possible. But it does not go *for the sake of Jesus,* to train a manservant or maidservant for Christ and for His honor. Salvation *for* his child. But the glory of Jesus *upon* his child and child's child becomes not the inspiring thought.

Then one is not conscious that he is a member of the people of God, and his child with him, that presently under the banner of the Cross he may take part in the conflict of that people of the Lord. One goes on from year to year, presently from the last year on earth he goes into eternity, but during those years themselves he has not lived in connection with eternity, and thereby has not seen to his children with an eye upon what after our dying awaits the people of God.

Such was the case with all too many for long years.

God be praised, there are better signs now. In our churches there is more stability. Baptism has become alive again. Ties to the past and to the future are felt again. A brighter dawn is rising.

But even that beautiful dawn will certainly go under again, if God does not establish the work of our hands, and unless in every company of the Lord's people, for every year that comes anew, the prayer of all fuses into this one prayer: "Thy glory, O God, be upon my children and children's children, from generation to generation. Amen.

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